Spectres of Minimalism

by

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Thesis submitted to the Edinburgh College of Art in fulfilment
of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Edinburgh College of Art

2009

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the following people for giving me the opportunity to develop my ideas in publications and at conferences, and for offering me valuable encouragement and advice: Jason E Bowman, Ian Christie, Wouter Davidts, Lynda Morris, Gavin Morrison, Jonathan Vickery, John C Welchman, and Jon Wood. Throughout the writing process I have been sustained and stimulated by conversations with Kirsten Lloyd, Lyndsay Mann, Clare MacChumhaill, Craig Mulholland, and Catherine Street. I am greatly indebted to Jan de Cock, and Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, for the time they have given me and the confidence they have shown in allowing me to speak for them.

Special thanks go to: Bill Hare and Andrew Patrizio, who set me on this path in the first place; to Louise S. Milne for sharing her wisdom and inspiring by example (providing a powerful model of scholarly rigour and humanity combined); to Alistair Rider and Maxa Zoller for their generosity in reading chapters and offering invaluable advice (I am proud to call them peers); to my parents, Marjorie Skinner and Peter Skinner for their unstinting moral (and financial) support over the years; and to my husband, Daniel Warren, for his dedicated emotional, creative and practical sustenance. It is no exaggeration to say that this thesis would never have been completed without him. *Spectres of Minimalism* is therefore dedicated to Daniel, who lived it with me.

Some of the material in chapter 7 was published as 'The Picture and the Step' in *Jan De Cock: Denkmal ISBN 9080842427*, Ghent: Atelier Jan De Cock, 2006

Chapter 8, in an earlier form, is due to be published as 'Moving in the Image' in *Film and Sculpture*, Ashgate and Henry Moore Institute, 2009

Abstract

Spectres of Minimalism

My thesis plays host to a variety of spectres. Taking the peripheral, overlooked qualities of shadows and reflections as a starting point, I show how discourse can narrow one's perceptual focus. 1960s polemics have concentrated the beam of light by which minimalist objects now appear, obscuring the marginal but tangible effect of Donald Judd's reflections. I ask why such reflections were ignored in his own writings, why they were regarded as problematic by contemporary critics concerned about 'illusionism', and why they have remained (largely) unexamined since; I conclude that quandaries about seductive illusion were of a similar order to contemporary worries around immersive spectacle. While these 'spectres' of minimalism – unacknowledged optical effects and repressed anxieties – have been omitted in historical discourse, they have re-materialised in later works by Susan Hiller, Mona Hatoum, Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, and Jan de Cock – works which can be characterised as parades of reflections, shadows, ghosts and avatars. In these artists' negotiations of their minimalist 'inheritance', they acknowledge and engage with the optical illusions, uncanny elements, and unspoken anxieties that inhabit Judd's works. Having experienced something akin to a haunting as hitherto hidden aspects of Judd's work have suddenly come to light, I now adopt an art historical methodology that not only takes account of, but is founded on, such spectral revelations. Seeing through the lenses that later artistic practices provide, I offer a contemporary re-reading of Judd's work: I propose a new set of associations with cinemas, cities, crystals and cars, and argue that, after all these years, Judd's works are still well placed to prompt philosophical reflections on contemporary experience.

Introduction

It took me several years to pay attention to the reflections in Donald Judd's works. In 2000, I attended an exhibition of the Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Bilbao. I was studying the work of artists such as Mona Hatoum (b. 1952), who had re-used the serial forms and modular repetitions of minimalism in the early 1990s. I wanted to find out what it was about such forms that they provided potent perceptual and conceptual possibilities in the 1960s for an artist like Judd, and retained significance for artists such as Hatoum who, it seemed, was at some chronological and cultural distance from Judd and his peers. I was frustrated to find that the museum's accompanying leaflet simply reproduced what I recognised as the rhetoric of artists such as Judd and Robert Morris, and Joseph Kosuth. Judd (1928-1994) and Morris (b. 1931) were contemporaries who both rejected 'illusionism' and produced works that deliberately invaded the space of the viewer (though, as we will see in chapter 4, they differed with regard to certain details). Kosuth (b. 1945) considered the physical manifestation of the work as merely a byproduct of the creative idea.[1] At one point, the text suggested that there were no 'hidden meanings.'[2] There was no attempt to offer a historical, cultural context for *why* artists might have felt this way about what art should be, or why they chose the forms and materials they did.

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[1] 'Donald Judd [...] rejected illusionism and adopted a more literal approach to art making by locating the meaning of a work in its actual material qualities. [...] Where once a passive act of looking took place, the advent of Minimalism motivated confrontation and interaction. Placed directly on the floor without pedestals, both of these sculptures represent the Minimalist effort to bring art into the actual space of the viewer; thus, the role of the viewer takes on new significance and the relationship between object, spectator, and the surrounding space is heightened. [...] These sculptures contain no referents or hidden meanings, and their horizontal emphasis limits any anthropomorphic reading. [...] Conceptual artists, including Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, further questioned the value of the discrete art object. They began making works that emphasized the idea over the physical product. Language became both content and material. The idea was emphasized over the artifact and the physical manifestation of a work was considered simply a byproduct of the cerebral creative process or idea.' *Changing Perceptions: The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum*, press release.

[2] Ibid.

Fig. 0.1 Richard Serra, *Belts*, 1966–67. Vulcanized rubber and neon, 72 x 300 x 20 inches (182.9 x 762 x 50.8 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Panza Collection. Photo: Attilio Maranzano.

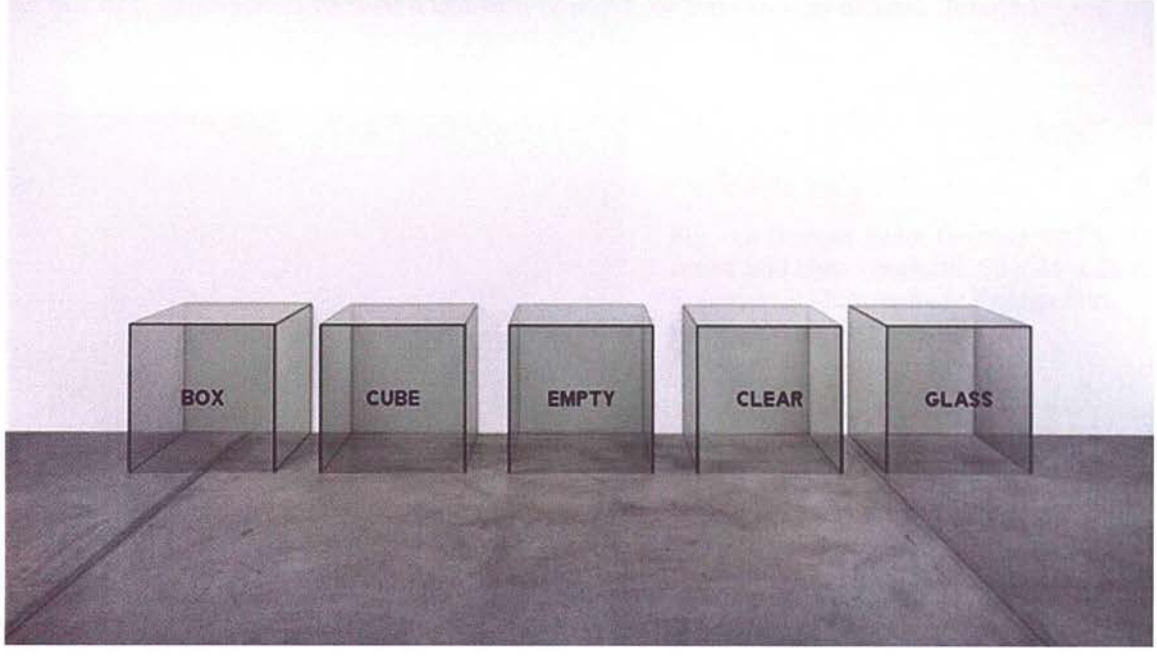

Fig. 0.2 Joseph Kosuth, *Box, Cube, Empty, Clear, Glass—a Description,* 1965, Hirshhorn Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Part of the Panza Collection.

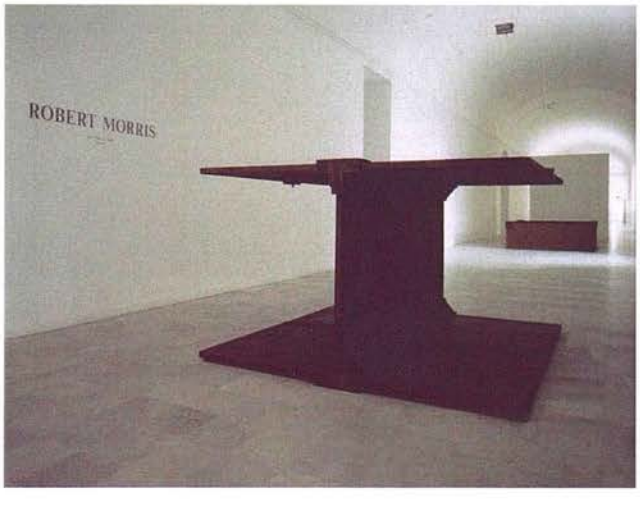

Fig. 0.3 Robert Morris *Untitled (5 Steel Plate Piece)*, 1969, H shape of steel plates, each 60 x 120 x 2 in, (overall 64 x 120 x 120 in). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection.

As I navigated the artists' rooms, containing, variously, Richard Serra's vulcanized rubber belts (fig. 0.1), Kosuth's five glass boxes (fig. 0.2), and Morris' five steel plates (fig. 0.3), I pondered the missing historical explanations for minimalism and conceptualism. I was unprepared for the shock of sparkling colour that greeted me when I finally encountered a room of works by Judd (figs. 0.4 and 0.5). I was expecting to be engrossed by another permutation of serialism. Having come directly from the industrial patina of Serra and Morris and the restrained conceptualism of Kosuth, the jewel-like quality of polished brass and coloured Plexiglas in Judd's works was overwhelmingly different. It offered a timely warning: not to neglect the specificity of Judd's works in favour of a generalised idea of a cultural context, or a particular artistic debate.

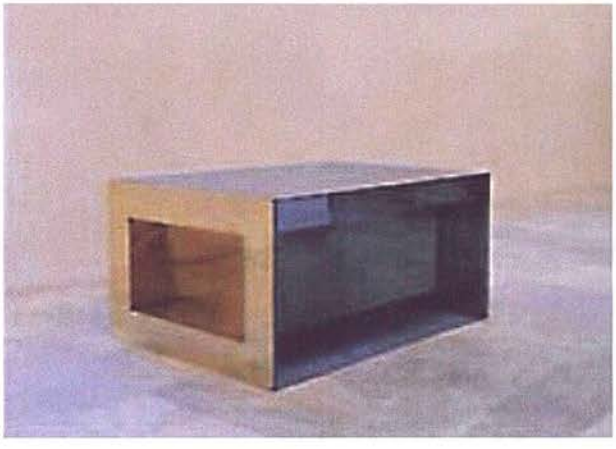

Fig. 0.4 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1973, brass and blue Plexiglas, 33 x 48 x 68in. Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, Panza Collection.

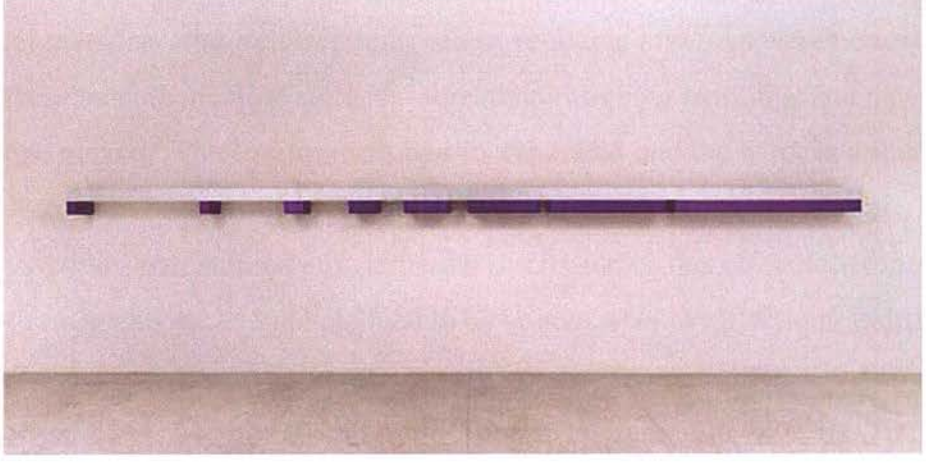

Fig. 0.5 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1970, 21' fibonacci progression, anodized aluminium tube with blue aluminium boxes, 8.25 x 253 x 8in. Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, Panza Collection.

Fig. 0.6 Donald Judd, installation view, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. Photo: Pablosanz (Flickr)[3]

In 2002, I visited the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, where the Judd works are made of more muted galvanised iron and cold-rolled steel (fig. 0.6). In the diffuse light of the large gallery, the walls, ceiling, and surrounding artworks were noticeably reflected in these smooth metallic surfaces – creating intriguing markings and patterns that shifted as one moved. The environment was incorporated into the work in a fluid way which seemed to be in tension with Judd's avowed focus on material forms. But I had not, at that time, encountered any particular discussion of this effect in writings about Judd (as I show in chapter 4, Judd claimed to be uninterested in reflections and shadows). I had no discursive frame of reference for their appearance, and it remained an interesting observation with no obvious application in my research.

[3] This image comes from the Flickr, a photo-sharing website, where 'noms de net' are used by the photographers instead of their real or professional names.

It wasn't until the survey exhibition of Judd's work at Tate Modern in 2004 that I began to see reflection as a palpable effect and an issue in its own right. Under the spotlights at Tate Modern, the crystalline, liquid qualities of the works' reflections were startling; and colour projections and shadows played upon the walls behind some of the suspended relief pieces. The same pieces were less psychedelic in the diffuse natural light of the Kunstmuseum Basel later that year, but once noticed, these effects were difficult to ignore. Comparing the presentations in the two galleries, one could see why Judd had anxieties about gallery lighting. His own preference was for natural light - he complained that spotlights generated vivid reflections that, for him, destroyed the subtleties of the works. Nevertheless, Judd used distinctively reflective materials throughout his career. As I show in chapter 4, some contemporary critics speculated about the 'opticality' of the work, but as they had little encouragement or corroboration from the artist, no definitive conclusions were handed down to historians, and reflections have remained marginal in subsequent historical accounts of minimalism.

Photographic illustration tends to produce a rational, 'neutral' view of the sculptural object, rather than picturing the object in particular environments surrounded by people. Yet it is often when other viewers are moving around Judd's works that the reflective surfaces are most noticeable. Documentation that shows this is rare, though not unheard of – fig. 0.7 shows Judd himself casting a shadow/reflection.

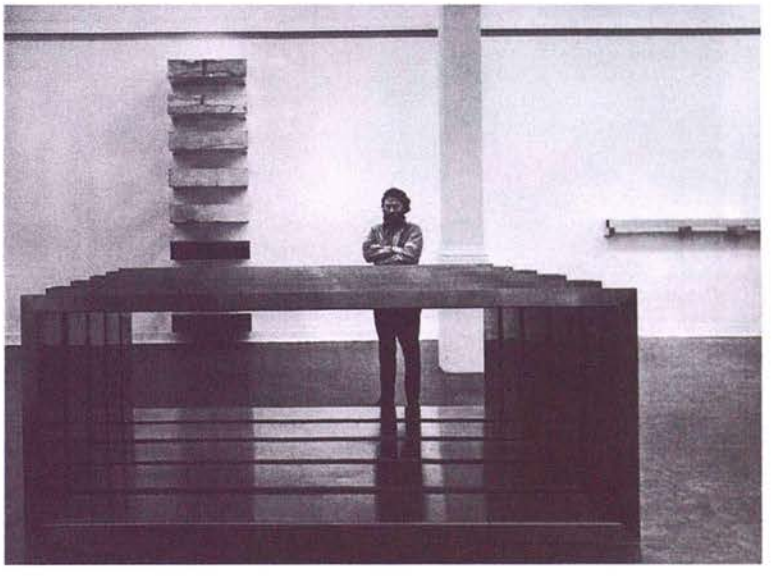

Fig. 0.7 *Don Judd*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 29 September - 1 November 1970

Fig. 0.8 Chinati Foundation, North Artillery Shed, with the permanent installation of fifty-two works by Donald Judd

Fig. 0.9 Chinati Foundation, South Artillery Shed, with the permanent installation of forty-eight works by Donald Judd

In the catalogue for the Tate exhibition, the galleries at Marfa are deserted (figs. 0.8 and 0.9). In contrast, the same galleries on contemporary photograph sharing sites, such as Flickr, appear peopled and animated (figs. 0.10 and 0.11).[4] There is a wealth of images on Flickr which suggest that today's viewers are drawn to the reflections and shadows that the works generate (figs. 0.12 and 0.13). Should this be regarded as a wilful contravention of the intentions of the artist? It is unlikely that Judd would have enjoyed seeing his works employed as sophisticated fairground mirrors. Yet the sustained and varied engagement with art evident in their photographic archives demonstrates that these photographers are sympathetic and sophisticated viewers. I am as interested as other art historians (and possibly *only* art historians) in trying to understand the historical significance and import of these works at their inception. I am also keen, however, to explore new readings opened up by such works when they are seen in new ways.

Fig.0.10 Chinati Foundation. Photo: Citywalker (Flickr)

[4] Flickr's users tend to be gifted, if not professional, photographers who often record their visits to art galleries. A search for images relating to Donald Judd produces over 2,500 photographs, many of them taken in permanent installations such as Chinati.

Fig. 0.11 Chinati Foundation. Photo: Citywalker (Flickr)

Fig. 0.12 Chinati Foundation. Photo: silencematters (Flickr)

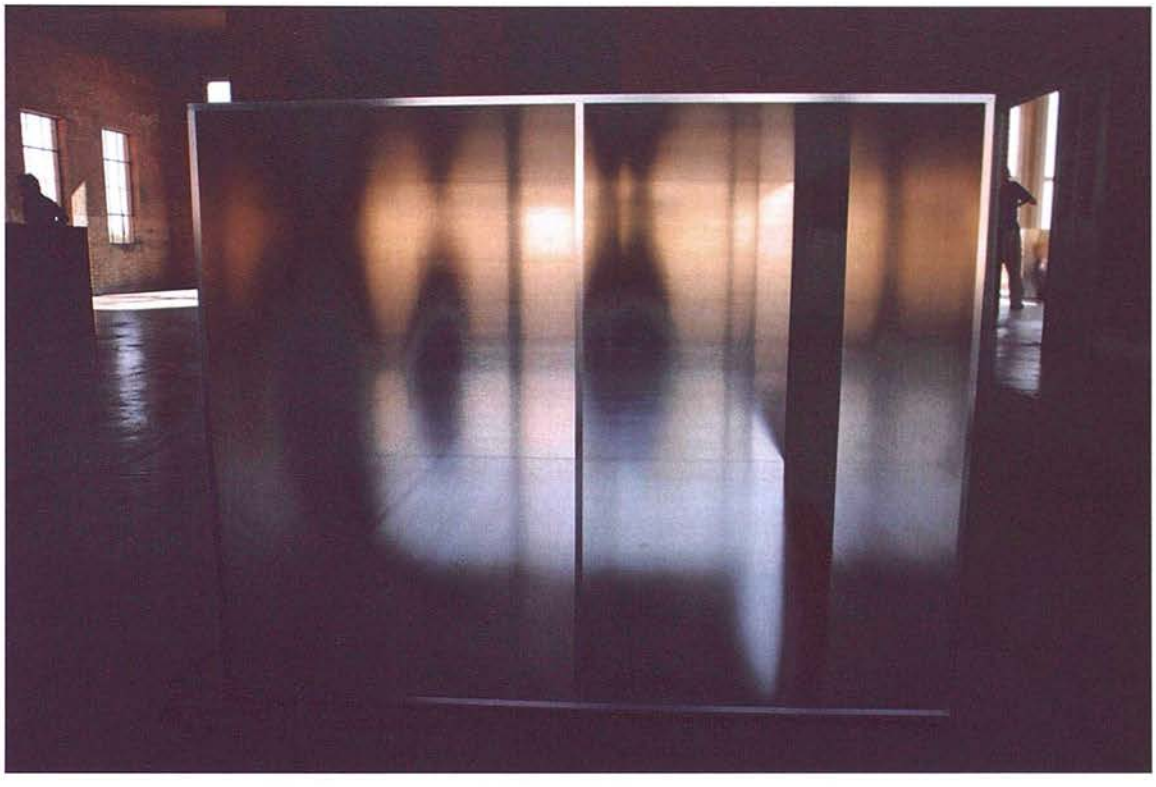

Fig. 0.13 Chinati Foundation. Photo: silencematters (Flickr)

Throughout this thesis I work on the premise that shadows and reflections are structurally and culturally inter-related. As I argue in chapter 1, reflections and shadows are emblems of the overlooked. They are ghostly things that appear in the corner of the eye. When a shadow or reflection emerges as an object of attention rather than part of the illumination of a scene, it disturbs the normative hierarchies of vision which place objects above effects. It interrupts the action of 'constancies', the stabilizing tendencies in perception that allow us to interpret changes in the scale, light and shade of objects without consciously registering them.[5] Also in chapter 1, I explore the analogical association which artists initiated in the early 20th century, between reflections and shadows and the cinematic/photographic image. Paying attention to peripheral optical

[5] As Ernst Gombrich put it, 'As a man comes to greet us in the street, his image will double in size if he approaches from twenty yards to ten. If he stretches his hand out to greet us, it becomes enormous. We do not register the degree of these changes; his image remains relatively constant and so does the colour of his hair, despite the changes of light and reflection.' EH Gombrich, 'Visual Discovery Through Art', *The Image and The Eye*, (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1982); repr., Robert Wilkinson, ed., *Theories of Art and Beauty*, (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1991) 520

effects is like a camera pulling focus. It reveals something that was always part of the scene, but was previously overlooked, blurred: literally, out of focus.

A morbid pleasure?

Michael Baxandall (1933-2008) published *Shadows and Enlightenment,* his 'study of shadows and their part in our visual experience,' in 1995. Three years later, Alex Potts (b. 1943), in an essay published in a special issue of *Art History* dedicated to Baxandall, explored the critical methodology that he had initiated.[6] Both authors noted that, having been prompted by others to take notice of shadows, they now saw them everywhere. Baxandall's usual habits of attention were re-directed by the eighteenth century shadow-watchers he had studied:

> Once Cochin has led one to attend, one notices something like his scheme in operation in the visual world, continually: pensively gauging the penetrability of middle-ground shadows can become an enjoyable part of life.[7]

In turn, Baxandall's unusual focus had prompted Alex Potts to look for different things in painting and sculpture.

> In thinking how Baxandall's study of shadow might prompt us to look closely at works of art in ways we have not done before, the best point to start is the most obvious one, the art of the Enlightenment. Once our attention is drawn to shadows, we start noticing them everywhere, in almost any art that comes our way.[8]

In discussing this refocusing of their interest, both writers also acknowledged anxieties about what seemed like its determined contrariness. Baxandall asked, 'am I destroying

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[6] Baxandall was a renowned Renaissance art historian who taught at the Warburg Institute in the 1950s and 1960s. Potts researched his PhD there the 1970s. Of particular interest will be his study of 'the sculptural imagination,' which includes an important phenomenological discussion of minimalism. Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) Both authors are known for interdisciplinary approaches that allow them to address themes across disparate cultural eras.

[7] Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 124

[8] Alex Potts, 'Baxandall and the Shadows in Plato's Cave', *Art History*, vol. 21, no. 4, December 1998, 538

shadows, as normal objects of perception, by submitting them to something as abnormal as attention?'[9] He was aware that the perpetual gauging of shadows might be considered a 'morbid pleasure, a deformation.'[10] For Potts too, shadow-spotting could 'easily become an idle and even irritating pastime,' one that might start 'blocking out full awareness of the complex processes of picturing of which shadowing is part.'[11] At one point he asked,

> [...] what larger justification is there for Baxandall's rather technical focus on shadowing in visual art? A disquiet underlying the compulsion to ask this question, which rises to the surface on several occasions in Baxandall's analysis, in a sense defines the logic of his book. Shadowing and shading, as he himself admits, can seem a narrowly technical concern. Is not the exclusive preoccupation with shadow in danger of offering a rather aridly formal perspective on eighteenth-century pictorial imagination? And is not shadow also peripheral to even the more purely painterly obsessions of the modern art world?[12]

Shadows are peripheral in conceptual as well as visual terms, Potts implied. In figurative painting they are arguably subordinate to the objects they help to render. In the case of modern abstraction, shadows cast by paint for instance are surely incidental. The danger of focussing on such shadows, then, was the 'idiocy latent in any too-focused and compulsive attentiveness, just the sort of thing that scholarly art historians are prone to once they have discovered a pet focus and are determined to get as much mileage out of it as possible.'[13] Potts drew a parallel between the fixed mindset of a scholarly bandwagon, which deadens its subject, and the morbidity of shadows themselves, which threaten to deaden vision:

> Shadow works so powerfully because it is always there in what we see – it provides both clarity and obscurity in our apprehension of the world around us. It gives vividness and variety to our perception of things, it brings the play of

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[9] Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, 75
[10] Ibid., 124
[11] Potts, 'Baxandall and the Shadows', 538
[12] Ibid., 537
[13] Ibid., 543

> light on them alive, but it also deadens sight, and opens up holes in our visual field – in the deepest shadows, there is nothing to see.

I would argue that this is, in itself, very intriguing: a 'nothing' in the midst of things? It sounds very suggestive. As Potts went on to say, 'For someone looking intently, the play of shadow may appear a play of life and death.' Following from this, I develop the idea that shadows and reflections are the place where the 'visible' and the 'invisible' meet, to use Maurice Merleau-Ponty's terminology (which I explore in chapter 1).[14] Looking at various objects and installations from the 1960s to the present, my readings often hinge on the status of reflections and shadows as totems of liminality.

Hidden in plain view

Reflections and shadows are not merely an interesting theme; as I have already suggested, I am drawn to them because they effect a re-orientation of attention, which accentuates the importance of observation and which reveals the overlooked. The risk that shadow-study would become a distracting 'pet focus' was mitigated, for Potts, on precisely these counts. Firstly, he said, the intriguing play of shadows helped one to 'sustain a fascination with the flux of visual sensation' and 'remain alive to the here and now.'[15] Baxandall and Judd shared the view that such sustained looking was essential to understanding, he indicated: 'Baxandall impels us 'to look and think' about shadows in art, 'to look and think, until it makes sense, becomes interesting' – as Judd put it.' [16]

To put Judd's statement into its original context, he was asked in a 1990 interview whether a viewer of his work should 'understand something' or 'just look.' Judd replied 'You have to do it all at once. You have to look and understand, both. In looking, you understand; it's more than you can describe. You look and think, look and think, until it makes sense, becomes interesting.'[17] Looking and thinking mutually informed each

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[14] See below, 23-5
[15] Potts, 'Baxandall and the Shadows', 545
[16] Ibid., 538
[17] Angeli Jahnsen (ed.) 'Discussion with Donald Judd', *Donald Judd*, exh. cat., (Kunstverein St Gallen, 1990) 54

other, culminating in an emotional and intellectual 'sensing' of the work ('interesting' here meant compelling, something that might be considered a valuable experience.)[18] Judd made it clear on a number of occasions that he disputed the habitual division between thinking and feeling. Speaking in 1983, he said 'I've always considered the distinction between thought and feeling as at the least exaggerated [...] All experience, large and small, involves feeling; all thought involves feeling. All feeling is based on experience that involves thought.'[19] Given this, any division between form and content also seemed to him absurd:

> I've always disliked the division between form and content and never known what to answer when asked "but what is the content?", "what does it mean?" Recently it occurred to me that this unreal and uninformative division is just part of the larger division between thought and feeling [...] Both halves are meaningless and without any function when considered alone. There is no form that can be form without meaning, quality and feeling.[20]

For Judd, to perceive the form *was* the way to understand it.[21]

The lesson learnt from shadows – to pay close attention to every aspect of visual experience – is one that Potts adhered to in his own critical practice. The enquiry in *The Sculptural Imagination* was founded on the close observation of sculptures (even as he analysed various philosophical discourses around them). It might be assumed that all art historians look closely at art works, yet Judd did not think so: 'My experience with art history at Columbia was that art historians never look at paintings,'[22] he pronounced

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[18] As David Raskin has testified, Judd often insisted on his debt to the behaviourist philosopher Ralph Barton Perry. He suggested that all behaviour stemmed from 'interest', which combined action and expectation to produce liking, disliking, desiring, avoiding and so on. '[Interest] is a synonym for "the motor-affective life" in its entirety,' Raskin writes. David Raskin, 'Judd's Moral Art', in *Donald Judd*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) 82. See also Richard Shiff, 'Fast Thinking', *Donald Judd: Late Work*, exh.cat., (New York: Pace-Wildenstein, 2000) 18, for more on the debate around Judd's use of the term 'interest'.

[19] Donald Judd, 'Art and Architecture', repr., in *Donald Judd, Architecture*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 2nd edn, 26

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Shiff, 'Fast Thinking' for a persuasive account that associates Judd's advocacy of thought-feeling with his commitment to 'wholeness.'

[22] Judd cited in Potts, 'Baxandall and the Shadows,' 531

decisively. As I explain in chapter 2, what Judd called 'the pragmatic, empirical attitude of paying attention to what is here and now'[23] was a feature of a particular critical tradition, in part initiated by Clement Greenberg, and developed in various ways by Judd and other critics in the 1960s.

Judd was not in any sense thinking about shadows when he made his exhortation to look and think, as we will see in chapter 4, but I am inspired by his logic to argue that reflections and shadows should nevertheless be seen as an important part of Judd's works. They tell us specific things about the shape of individual works and the nature of their materials. They are also mesmerising, visceral, intriguing. One's emotional and intellectual responses to reflections and shadows necessarily become part of the way one thinks about each work as a whole.

The second benefit of bringing shadows to the forefront of critical attention was that it served to highlight, according to Potts, 'the apparent marginality of shadowing in conventional understandings of visual aesthetics.'[24] He was struck by the fact that 'even where shadow effects emerge most unavoidably, in three-dimensional art, art-critical discourse seems largely oblivious to them.'[25] The discourse around Judd's works rarely touched on such effects, he noticed, in spite of the fact that the shape and boundaries of a work such as *Untitled*, 1968 (a work in amber-coloured Plexiglas and steel owned by the Whitney Museum), became 'quite ambiguous because of the complex play of shadow and reflection, and the shifting patterns of coloured light penetrating the Plexiglass.'[26]

Are reflections and shadows important because they are *there*, or because they have been unnoticed by others, or both? I take to heart the observation made by Edgar Wind:[27]

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[23] Ibid., p. 532
[24] Potts, 'Baxandall and the Shadows,' 538
[25] Ibid., 541
[26] Ibid., 542
[27] Wind (1900-1971) was another Renaissance art historian associated with the Warburg Institute.

> The belief that because something is not stressed it must be important is not entirely without merit... By the same token it is a prejudice to assume that a thing must be central because it looks marginal. Yet, the supposition that some things which look marginal may be central is one of these judicial reflections that rarely fail to open up new fields of knowledge, because they introduce a change of focus.[28]

Wind judges the transposition of margins and centres to be beside the point. That a change of focus invariably opens up new fields of knowledge is enough to recommend it. The marginality of the discussion about reflections and shadows in minimalist discourse suggests a blind spot, which warrants further exploration for what it can tell us about 1960s discourse *and* for the new insights it might bring to the work.

Shifting perspectives

Since the 1960s, historical readings of minimalism have accumulated to create a multi-faceted crystal. Due to the prominence of certain art historical approaches, this crystal has most often been turned to show minimalism through its discursive frames. In the first important work about minimalism, which appeared in 1990, the art historian Francis Colpitt analysed and distilled the artists' theoretical positions. In *Return of the Real*, Hal Foster (who was taught by Rosalind Krauss and eventually joined *October* as a co-editor in the 1980s), continued the job of recovering and exploring the specific intellectual discourse which had framed minimalism and pop in the 1960s, and which had been somewhat lost in the intervening years.[29] Foster's work was developed and refined by his student, James Meyer, in a 2001 book which took on 'minimal discourse itself as an historical object.'[30] It was Meyer who, in the same year, edited the tome on Minimalism

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[28] Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (rev. ed., New York and London, 1968), 203, cited by Louise Milne in 'On the Side of the Angels: Susan Hiller's Witness and Other Works,' *Susan Hiller*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark, 2002, 30

[29] At a symposium, 'Donald Judd: The Writings', held on 28 February 2004 at Tate Modern, Foster was criticised for not considering the works closely enough. He defended himself by insisting that, at the time he was writing, the radical nature of minimalist objects was disappearing from popular view because attention was focussed solely on their appearance, which could not convey the philosophical turmoil of their origins.

[30] James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p6

in Phaidon's 'Themes and Movements' series, which illustrated the art works associated with the 'movement' and explored its subsequent canonization, reproducing many of the articles now deemed as 'definitive'. Only Potts has provided a different perspective, exploring minimalism's 'concerns about the sculptural object and the phenomenology of sculptural viewing,'[31] in a broader survey of the figurative, the modernist and the minimalist modes of sculptural viewing. In all of these accounts, the thorough recapitulation of the artists' own writings and the elaboration of some of the wider philosophical parameters of the work serves to illuminate the complexities of minimal art for a historically distant audience, and helps to pinpoint the important shifts in viewer-object relations that these works instigated. I want to re-iterate that it is not my intention to somehow 'correct' these art historical accounts, or uncover a supposed 'truth' behind their repressions. Rather, I want to turn the crystal again, and view familiar works from a new perspective.

Because my perspective is unfamiliar, and I seek to address tensions that lie beneath the surface of discourse, it will be best to develop my methodology in tandem with my overall argument. In chapter 1, I explore the ways in which the marginal status of shadows and reflections has been used by artists. In chapters 2 and 3, I consider the competing models of art history developed in the 1960s (some models demonstrated an interest in 'blind spots', others could not accommodate them). The most useful approaches consider artworks as signs, open to different readings at different times depending on where attention is focussed. In chapter 4, I address the postures and prohibitions of the 1960s polemic around illusionism that Judd helped to shape, and which provided the armature for critics' tentative discussions about Judd's optical 'illusions'. In chapter 5, I draw on Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* to develop a picture of history as a 'hauntology', and introduce the spectre of spectacle, a challenging aspect of late modernity. I show that just as reflections and shadows haunted the works of Judd, they re-appear in the works of the younger artists, Susan Hiller (b. 1942), Hatoum (b. 1952), Jan de Cock (b. 1976), and Joanne Tatham (b. 1969) and Tom

[31] Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, xi

O'Sullivan (b. 1967). I argue in chapters 6 and 7 that these artists shine a light on certain features of their minimalist 'inheritance' that have been largely overlooked or suppressed. They 'speak to spectres', to use Derrida's phrase. Prompted by these younger artists to look at Judd's works in a different light, I formulate a new set of readings of Judd's works in chapter 8, seeing his objects through the glinting lenses of crystals, cinema, cities, and car-travel.

Chapter 1
Attending to Reflections and Shadows

In this chapter I explore the nature of reflections and shadows and suggest that they have a special relationship with attention. This is most clearly demonstrated in examples from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when attention first emerged as a separate topic of enquiry. This discussion sets out some methodological parameters and introduces some visual themes that will resonate throughout the thesis.

'Global illumination'

Reflections and shadows are determinate, but fluid at the same time. They are not objects; nor are they properties of objects. Rather, reflections and shadows represent the effects of objects on other objects – they make relations between them visible, and draw attention to the inextricable intertwining of light, objects and perceivers.

In his study of shadow, Baxandall observed:

> If one thinks of shadow as an entity out there, it is strange. It is a real material fact, a physical hole in light, but it has neither stable form nor continuity of existence; on the other hand the metamorphoses it goes through are determinate, and though it is discontinuous it can recur. Like colour, [and also reflection] shadow is only realized as secondary to light; but unlike colour, shadow has no permanent molecularly denominated territory of its own. While its actual manifestation is on surfaces, its domain is three-dimensional and within this domain anything is subject to it.[1]

Baxandall works from the premise that, in simple terms, photons (light particles) are 'reflected' off surfaces onto the eye, and that shadows are generated by fluctuations in the trajectory of those photons. 'There are unevennesses, interruptions to the flux, almost "holes in the light", as an eighteenth century scientist called them. These are

[1] Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, 144

shadow.'[2] Reflections, in contrast, are seen when the light coming off one surface bounces off another before it reaches the eye – they are technically speaking *re-reflections*. The surface upon which the light falls is crucial, as different surfaces reflect light differently.

> *Lambertian* surfaces,[3] such as chalk or indeed the moon, reflect diffusely in such a way that they seem equally bright from any angle; they are powerful factors in the production of ambient light.[4] [...] *Specular* surfaces like shiny polished metal, by contrast, reflect light preferentially at an angle equal to the angle of incidence, and straight.[5]

Specular surfaces concentrate the reflected light beams: either into a lustre *highlight* if the surface is curved (like a bottle), or into a palpable *reflection* if the surface is flat (like a mirror).

Beyond their primary constitution, Baxandall also explains that other factors bear on how shadows and reflections are perceived. The light source's proximity to an object, and its brightness and extension (that is to say, the variation from point-like source to infinite ambient source) affect the nature and intensity of the light reaching the object. The medium through which the light is transmitted, and the distance that the light's reflection must travel to reach the viewer, will modify the intensity, hue and diffuseness of the reflections and shadows that the viewer then sees.

Furthermore, in any one scene, the reflection of light from one surface is re-reflected in, or deflected by, many other surfaces. This creates further shadows and onward reflections, often tinted by the colour of the first object. Baxandall calls this *global illumination*:

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[2] Ibid., 2
[3] 'The term Lambertian is from the eighteenth century student of light Johann Heinrich Lambert.' Ibid., 6
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 8

> This is modification of the primary lighting by complex secondary interactions between light and surfaces in the local environment – reflections (with tinges of acquired hue), continuing re-reflections, local denied reflections (from shadowed surfaces), incursions into shadowed surfaces by alien-hued reflections, and occasional complications from light's twisting negotiation of transparent surfaces.[6]

Any scene, then, is a complex of intertwining reflections and shadows.

I am drawn to the term 'chiasmic' used by the phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) to describe the intertwining of the act of seeing with what is visible.[7] Judd himself was more interested in pragmatism and behaviourist empiricism than phenomenology, but Merleau-Ponty's work was considered sufficiently relevant in the mid 1960s for Rosalind Krauss to cite his ideas in a review of Judd's work,[8] and I will return to this reference in chapter 4. For now, I am interested in the special role Merleau-Ponty accords to reflections and shadows. Merleau-Ponty's visualisation of the 'flesh of the world' is an animated equivalent of Baxandall's observations about global illumination:

> When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as* it is and where it is – which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself – the aqueous power, the syrupy and shimmering content – is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, it materializes itself there, yet it is not contained there; and if I raise my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections is playing, I

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[6] Ibid., 6

[7] 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm' is the name of a chapter in *The Visible and the Invisible* (begun in 1959 and left incomplete at Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961, it was subsequently published in 1964 and translated into English in 1968.) In it, Merleau-Ponty argued that we could not see without being seen, and suggested that sight was like touching (when we touch something, we are also touched by it.) 'The look envelops, palpates, espouses visible things,' he said. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 132

[8] Rosalind Krauss, 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd', *Artforum*, vol 4, no 9, May 1966, 24. See below, 147

> cannot gainsay the fact that the water visits it, too, or at least sends into it, upon it, its active and living essence.[9]

The flesh is described as an 'element' in the arcane sense of the word (like air, water, earth and fire) that allows the visible to appear 'as it is and where it is.'[10] The 'scene', as we can see in this example, is a dynamic state of affairs, which incorporates all aspects of the visible, including the light effects that are, of course, in constant flux. As Merleau-Ponty pointed out, while a thing might be said by some to 'occupy' space (a commonplace with which he took issue) the same cannot be said of the qualities of that thing. They 'inhabit', they 'materialise' themselves, and they act on other objects. It does not make sense, then, to first identify things in a scene, and then try to grasp the relations between them (wherein consisted the common view of the transcendent position of the perceiver). As Merleau-Ponty's translator, Alphonso Lingis, explained:

> The visible is not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals that would have to be connected and combined by a mind constitutive of relations; it is a field, a relief, a topography unfolding by differentiation, by segregation, which holds together not by laws, but [citing Merleau-Ponty] 'through the reflections, shadows, levels and horizons between things (which are not things and are not nothing, but on the contrary mark by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and in the same world).'[11]

Merleau-Ponty argued that a thing is determined on the one hand by where it is and how it behaves at a particular moment (in the visible), and on the other, by a consciousness of how and where else it could be, its (invisible) latency or possibility. Thus, the 'element'

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[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit*, cited by Alphonso Lingis in his translator's preface to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, xlvii-iii

[10] 'The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element' in the sense that it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being [i.e. a consistency of presentation] wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being.' Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139-40

[11] Alphonso Lingis, 'Translator's Preface' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, l-li, citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 24

of flesh 'adheres' to the here and now, but also 'inaugurates' the possibility of different times and places:

> [The flesh is] Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to a *location* and the *now*. Much more, the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency of the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact. And at the same time what makes facts have meaning, makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves around 'something'. [12]

In other words, we make sense of specific 'facts' by contrasting them with what they might be, but are not. Each perceptual experience is thus only a glimpse of the 'total visible' which 'is always behind, or after or between the aspects we see of it.'[13]

> Perception opens the world to me as a surgeon opens a body, catching sight, through the window he has contrived, of the organs in full functioning, taken *in their activity*, seen sideways. It is thus that the sensible initiates me to the world [...]: by encroachment, *Ueberschreiten*.[14]

If we are persuaded by Merleau-Ponty's construction of the flesh of the world, then reflections and shadows might be taken as exemplars of it – as totems of the inextricability of things, qualities, relations, and our perception of these in the visible. Equally important for this thesis, reflections and shadows would thereby act as intimations of the *in*visible. Reflections and shadows mark, according to Merleau-Ponty, 'the fields of possible variation' in the flesh of the world;[15] they open onto the 'invisible': 'that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility [...]'[16] Because shadows and reflections are, in essence, variation, they signal the existence, at every moment, of a wider realm of latent possibility.

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[12] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139-40
[13] Ibid., 136
[14] Ibid., 218
[15] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, English trans., R. McCLeary, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 16
[16] Ibid., 20

An economy of attention

In describing the chiasmic nature of reflections and shadows, I have characterised them on the one hand as part of the 'element' through which the world is perceived; and on the other, as a representation of convergence between the visible and the invisible. Clearly, this is to see reflections and shadows in two different ways - attention is deployed differently in each instance. As I discussed in the introduction, seeing 'through' shadows and reflections might be equated to 'normal' vision, whilst taking shadows and reflections as perceptual and conceptual objects in themselves requires/engenders a particular re-focusing of attention. Indeed, one of the reasons that reflections and shadows are so interesting is that they help to make the vagaries of attention visible. Their intermittent calls on our attention prompt the questions: what is attention, and why does it vary? Is it a psychological or a physiological response? Can it be directed? As Jonathan Crary showed in a 1999 book on attention and spectacle in modernity, these questions were first addressed in the mid to late 19th century.[17]

Crary argues that after the emergence of a 'subjective conception of vision' in the first half of the nineteenth century, perception could no longer be thought of in terms of 'immediacy, presence, punctuality.'[18] Goethe, for instance, described an experiment in which retinal after-images were generated when he closed up the hole in a camera obscura. The floating colours produced by this action were not 'out there' in the room but were, as Goethe explained, 'physiological' colours. In this experiment the body became 'the active producer of optical experience,' and vision became an object of observation in itself.[19] The physiologist, Johannes Müller represented the body as a factory of mechanical impulses, and proposed a theory of nerve energies that would again cast the body as the centre of production rather than a mere receptor of

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[17] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: October, MIT Press, 1999). Crary was taught by Meyer Schapiro amongst others, at Columbia University, and is well known for his interdisciplinary approach to the history of vision. He contributed to the conference and discussion that Hal Foster published as *Vision and Visuality*, (New York: The New Press, 1988).

[18] Crary, *Suspensions*, 4

[19] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: October, MIT Press, 1990, 68-9 discussing findings in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Theory of Colours*

information. He showed through experimentation that the same stimulus (electricity, for example) produced different sensations in different nerves (giving an impression of light in the optic nerve, for example, or a smell in the olfactory nerve).[20] As a result of these and other observations, the body was endowed with a thickness of its own, which affirmed that the physiological processes of perception actually involved absence, indirectness, displacement and delay. These revelations led to a crisis in perception in the 1880s and 1890s.[21] The role of attention, in framing and directing what were now understood to be contingent processes of perception, became a crucial topic amongst physiologists, psychologists, philosophers and others.[22] According to Crary, attention offered 'a simulation of presence, and a makeshift, pragmatic substitute in the face of its impossibility.'[23]

From the outset, attention was discussed in positivist terms: as a form of mental illumination, in which a limited number of objects or stimuli stood out from a background of myriad possible attractions. Fundamental to the concept of attention, then, was *organization*: selection and isolation on the one hand, and repression and exclusion on the other. For Charles Darwin, selective attention was a survival mechanism; new elements in the perceptual field triggered a systemic re-focussing of attention. For the physiologist William Carpenter, attention could be directed through training; a young subject might be taught to focus on certain things deemed important by

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[20] Thus, Müller explained, our attribution of a sensation to an external stimulus was, in fact, a matter of interpretation: 'That which through the medium of our senses is actually perceived by the sensorium, is indeed merely a property or change of condition of our nerves; but the imagination and reason are ready to interpret the modifications in the state of the nerves produced by external influences as properties of the external bodies themselves.' Johannes Müller, Introduction to *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen*, Book V (Koblenz, 1838) reprinted in Robert Schwartz, ed., *Perception*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 37.

[21] Ibid., 2

[22] 'Beginning in the 1870s there was an explosion of research and debate on this topic. It was a major issue in the influential work of Gustav Fechner, Wilhelm Wundt, Titchener, Theodor Lipps, Carl Stumpf, Oswald Külpe, Ernst Mach, William James and many others who interrogated the empirical and epistemological status of attentiveness. Also, the pathology of a supposedly normative attentiveness was an important part of the inaugural work in France of researchers like J.-M. Charcot, Alfred Binet, and Théodule Ribot. In the 1890s attention became a major issue for Freud, and was one of the problems at the heart of his abandonment of the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' and his move to new psychical models.' Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 23

[23] Ibid., 4

their teacher.[24] The psychologist William James, meanwhile, characterized experience as a stream of impressions and thoughts, attention allowed a figurative 'freezing' of the stream. James compared observers to artists, making aesthetic and ethical choices in how they selected and suppressed detail within the welter of possibilities (communities of communication and value were made possible, he argued, by the fact that people tended to make overlapping, similar choices).[25]

The complement to selective attention was repression. For Freud, the repression of traumatic events protected the psychic system from an excess of affect. For other psychologists, such as Hermann von Helmholtz, regular repressions of more mundane stimuli occurred automatically, in order to increase perceptual and psychic efficiency. He proposed, as Crary puts it, 'a quasi-utilitarian functioning of the mind in which sensory information that is unlikely to be useful or necessary is involuntarily unattended to.'[26] For Nietzsche, rapt attention could bring about an absorption that allowed creativity and 'life-affirming action,' but absorption was also demanded (and thus, for Nietzsche, increasingly compromised) by the exigencies of everyday culture. He lamented that

> Now only one kind of seriousness remains in the modern soul, that directed towards the new brought by the newspaper or the telegraph. To employ the moment and, so as to profit for it, to assess its value as quickly as possible! - one might believe that modern man has retained only one virtue, that of *presence of mind.*[27]

Nietzsche's anxious distinction between rapt absorption (inspired by art and philosophy) and seductive immersion (occasioned by new forms of mass media), would be revisited,

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[24] 'It is the aim of the Teacher to fix the attention of the Pupil upon objects which may have in themselves little or no attraction for it... The habit of attention, at first purely automatic, gradually becomes, by judicious training, in great degree amenable to the Will of the Teacher, who encourages it by the suggestion of appropriate motives.' William B. Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, (1874) 4th ed, (London: Kegan Paul, 1896) pp. 134-5 cited in Crary, *Suspensions*, 63

[25] Ibid., 62

[26] Ibid.

[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, R.J.Hollingdale, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 219, cited in Crary, *Suspensions,* 53, emphasis added by Crary.

time and again, in twentieth century cultural debates. I will return, for instance, to Guy Debord's critique of immersion in the *Society of Spectacle* in chapter 5.

The emphasis in these accounts was on psychic productivity and efficiency - a mechanistic view that served, as well as reflected, the demands of an industrialised capitalist milieu.[28] But a normative observer was not only conceptualized in terms of the 'isolated objects of attention', it was also understood according to 'what is not perceived, or only dimly perceived, of the distractions, the fringes and peripheries that are excluded or shut out of the perceptual field.[29] Thus, articulating a subject in relation to their attentive capacities simultaneously revealed a subject 'incapable of conforming to such disciplinary imperatives.'[30] Attention was offered as a potential means of synthesizing the 'fragmentation and atomization of a cognitive field,'[31] but at the same time it was found to be indefinite, fugitive, and liable to degrade. This was illustrated most forcefully in the late 19th century by the popular spectacle of hypnosis (both a medical treatment and an entertainment). Here, extreme focussed attention was seen to produce a hypnotic trance, which gave rise to uncomfortable questions, according to Crary:

> How could attention, which was posed as a bulwark against dissociation, a guarantee of the cohesiveness of consciousness and its relation to the world, a

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[28] Within the new socio-economic imperatives of modernity, the subject was required to concentrate and be productive, *and* to submit themselves to the endless attraction of new things (that is, to a constant state of distraction). 'At the moment when the dynamic logic of capital began to dramatically undermine any stable or enduring structure of perception, this logic simultaneously attempted to impose a disciplinary regime of attentiveness. [...] It was a problem whose centrality was directly related to the emergence of a social, urban, psychic, and industrial field increasingly saturated with sensory input. Inattention, especially within the context of new forms of large-scale industrialized production, began to be treated as a danger and a serious problem, even though it was often the very modernized arrangements of labour that produced inattention. It is possible to see one crucial aspect of modernity as an ongoing crisis of attentiveness, in which the changing configurations of capitalism continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products, sources of stimulation, and streams of information, and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception.' Crary, *Suspensions*, 13-14

[29] Crary, *Suspensions*, 40

[30] Ibid., 14

[31] Ibid.

> tool of productivity, be so immediately adjacent to the states that implied a loss of self-possession, of conscious affect and agency?[32]

In the context of a shift in the 1870s from *structural* to *functional* psychology, attention became characterized as a dynamic process that ebbed and flowed, intensified and diminished - occasionally, but only inconsistently, subject to the willed control of the observer. In fact, Crary suggests, the more one investigated attention, the more it was shown to contain within itself the conditions for its undoing: 'attentiveness was in fact continuous with states of distraction, reveries, dissociation and trance.'[33] Forcing oneself to concentrate on something was liable to produce the opposite effect - 'it was haunted by the possibility of its own excess.'[34]

Recapitulating the history of attention provides a useful introduction for my consideration of reflections and shadows in art. First, it forms a backdrop for my discussion regarding the 'centring' of reflections and shadows in certain Russian photography and expressionist film in the early twentieth century, which I explore in the rest of this chapter. Second, it establishes the beginnings of an intellectual tradition that has continued into the 21st century, which expresses anxiety about the way one's attention is seduced and monopolised by 'mediatised' spectacle. I will show in chapter 5 that while Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio worry that the spectacle is all-consuming, Gilles Deleuze suggests that the thickness of the body provides the possibility of self-conscious resistance. Third, it will be useful to bear in mind the ambiguous way attention offers the possibility of absorption while at the same time asserting the illusory and transient nature of such absorption. As Crary puts it,

> The roots of the word *attention* in fact resonate with a sense of 'tension,' of being 'stretched' and also of 'waiting.' It implies the possibility of a fixation, of holding something in wonder or contemplation, in which the attentive subject is

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[32] Ibid., 66
[33] Ibid., 45-6
[34] Ibid., 47

> both immobile and ungrounded. But at the same time a suspension is also a cancellation or an interruption, and I wanted here to indicate a disturbance, even a negation of perception itself. For throughout the book I am concerned with the idea of perception that can be both an absorption *and* an absence or deferral.[35]

In this structural ambivalence there is perhaps an echo of Merleau-Ponty's visible and invisible: wherever and whenever one's attention is focussed, there is an implied 'elsewhere' that is absent, and a range of other 'possibilities' that have been deferred. This tension between presence and absence is a theme which underpins much of the analysis of reflections and shadows in this thesis.

C(enter) the shadow

Staying in the late 19th and early 20th century, the rest of chapter 1 considers how shadows and reflections came to be associated with the new arts of photography and cinema, and at the same time, came to represent aspects of the oneiric and the unconscious. It is useful to establish the breadth and ubiquity of these historical associations so that when I discuss shadows and reflections in the art of the 1960s and after, their cultural and artistic context is understood. Crary's account gave us a nuanced picture of the interdisciplinary field of what we might call Romantic science - engaged in the exploration of natural perception and in positing new models of subjectivity and selfhood within modernity. We will see that in the late 19th century, artists such as the Impressionists reflected scientific findings in the development of their painterly techniques and in their choice of subjects. By the time war gripped the world in the second decade of the 20th century, though, there had been a break between science and art, and such perceptual and philosophical considerations became the sole preserve of artists.

Impressionism

The realist programme of writers and artists in Paris in the 1860s and 1870s extended to rendering perception itself, and particularly the perception of colour, which was being

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[35] Ibid., 10

revealed in the work of Chevreuil[36] and others. Thickly applied paint rendered all the aspects of the scene (light and objects) in the same manner, so the dappled light falling through trees at La Moulin de la Gallette (fig. 1. 1), or the brightly coloured reflections in the water at La Grenouillère (fig. 1.2), were given unaccustomed prominence. The artists' close observation, and their attempts to bring all aspects of the visual field into simultaneous view, gave hitherto unnoticed, ephemeral effects a new *substance*, and made them palpable.

Fig. 1.1 Pierre Auguste Renoir, *Le Moulin de la Galette,* 1876, oil on canvas, 131x175 cm, Louvre, Paris

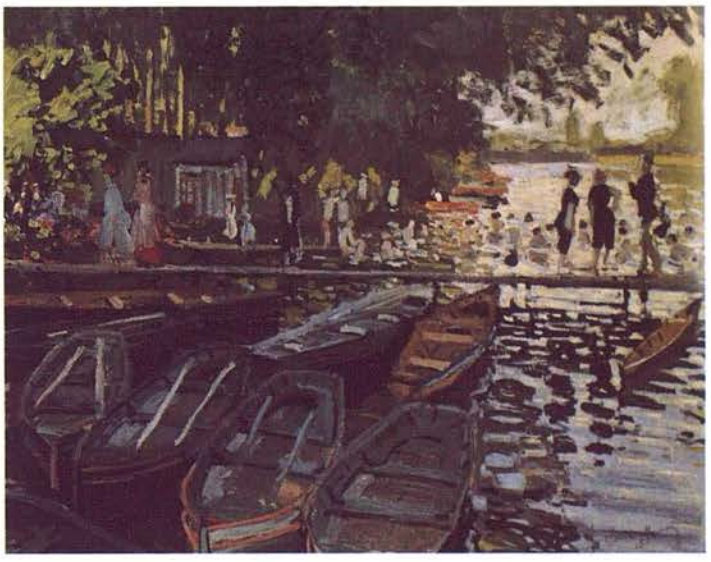

Fig. 1.2 Claude Monet, *La Grenouillère,* 1869, oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm, National Gallery, London

[36] Eugène Chevreuil (1786-1889) developed the theory of simultaneous colour contrasts, whereby colour look different depending on the colours next to them.

At the same time, painters were pre-occupied with how to *frame* the flux they sought to capture. How did the frame relate to what was outside it? In his history of the shadow in art, Victor Stoichita recalled a character in Emile Zola's *L'Oeuvre* (1886), who dreams an '"impressionist" dream.'[37] Gaguère, the dreamer, describes 'An impression… To me this is above all a landscape that disappears into the distance, a melancholic street corner, where the shadow of the tree we cannot see is projected.'[38] The tree's shadow, in other words, gestures to a realm 'outside-the-frame'. Stoichita suggested that Zola's dream image was intended to allude to 'a new perception [amongst Impressionist painters] of the boundaries of an image and their function.'[39] It also conjured a negative presence, just out of view.

Fig. 1.3 Pierre Auguste Renoir, *The Pont des Arts, Paris,* c.1867-8, oil on canvas, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA

[37] Ibid., 103
[38] Gaguère in Emil Zola, *L'Oeuvre*, vol xiv in Les Rougon Macquart (Paris, 1966) 84, cited in Stoichita, *A Short History*, 103
[39] Stoichita, *A Short History*, 104

In Renoir's *The Pont des Arts, Paris*, (fig. 1.3), for example, a wide view of the Pont des Arts and the Paris beyond is seen from the Pont du Carrousel. Along the bottom edge of the painting, the shadow of the Pont du Carrousel, complete with traversing pedestrians, is cast upon the quayside below. Stoichita speculated that the artist (positioned as he must have been amongst these shadows) is identifying himself with the crowd, and projecting himself as 'the transitory and impermanent figure of the observer;'[40] affirming the comparison that Baudelaire made between the painter of modern life and the *flâneur*, immersed in 'the people, the surge, the action, the elusive and the infinite' but at the same time 'hidden from it'.[41] Baudelaire wrote,

> The observer is a *prince* who relishes being incognito wherever he goes [...] It is an insatiable *self* of the *non-self*, which at each moment portrays and expresses it in images more alive than life itself, perpetually mercurial and elusive.[42]

Baudelaire's depersonalised observer was a spectral presence; it lingered in the corner of one's eye, like the self in a dream, or the artist standing over a canvas.

Photography

This conscious exploitation of the frame was continued, and indeed accentuated in the experimental photography of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Consider two photographs, by Alfred Stieglitz (fig. 1.4) and Claude Monet (fig. 1.5). Like the tree in Gaguère's dream, the observer/photographers appear in the image as cast shadows, proxies of themselves. The presence of the real artists just outside the frame is intuited, but remains speculative. These shadows, at one time intimately and indexically connected to their owners, have drifted free of them while remaining recognisably figural – they have acquired a ghostly autonomy.

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[40] Victor I Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) 106
[41] Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne,' (1863) *Ecrits sur l'art*, II (Paris, 1971) 176, cited in Stoichita, *A Short History*, 106
[42] Ibid.

Fig.1.4 Alfred Stieglitz, *Shadows on the Lake – Stieglitz and Walkowitz*, 1916, gelatin photograph, 11.3 x 8.9, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

Fig. 1.5 Claude Monet, *Monet's Shadow on the Lily Pond,* c. 1920, photograph, 4 x 5, Collection Philippe Piguet, Paris

The irony is that these shadows appear on the surface of water, where we might expect reflections. As Stoichita put it, 'Likeness is [...] a criterion regulated by the specular reflection and not by the cast shadow. Monet and Stieglitz transformed the specular

reflection into a silhouette, thus blurring the boundaries that separate the reflective surface from the projection screen.'[43] One's reflection in water or in a mirror has been a standard motif of self-perception and thus the self-portrait for centuries. A projected shadow on the other hand, offers no detail, except perhaps in profile, which, of course, cannot be seen by the person casting it. Looking at a shadow of oneself thus involves confronting an indeterminate blur.

These photographs picture ghostly figures voided of distinguishing features, in place of the lovely image of Narcissus. Elements such as Monet's hat, and the animated postures of Stieglitz and Walkowitz, project a playful, rather than disturbing tone, however. The photographs are formal/conceptual puns rather than psychological allegories: the sun and shadow hit the water just as varied light hits a photographic plate. (There is a parallel here with Man Ray's camera-less experiments, also conducted at this time. His 'Rayographs' were made by shining light through objects sitting directly on a photo-sensitive surface (fig. 1.6). I return to Man Ray's photography shortly). We see such optical effects aligned with, and conveyed through, new technologies.

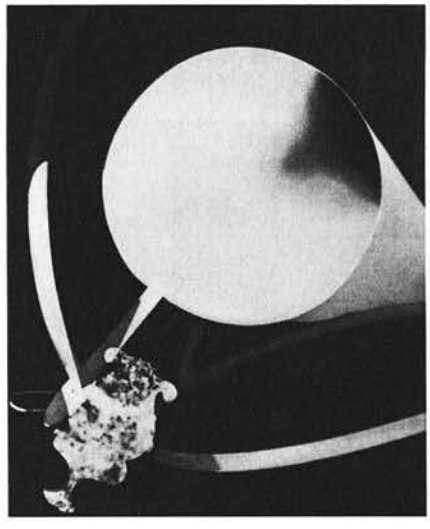

Fig.1.6 Man Ray, *Rayograph* (from *L'Ange Heurtebise*), 1925, photgravure, Zabriskie Gallery, New York and Paris, copyright Juliette Man Ray

[43] Stoichita, *A Short History*, 112-3

German Expressionism

From the outset, cinema had been linked in popular imagination with shadows and ghosts. In a review of the Lumière brothers' programme Gorky famously wrote, 'Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows. It is not life, but its shadow, it is not motion, but its soundless spectre.' [44]

Fig.1.7 Robert Wiene and Willy Hameister, stills from *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, 1920

Fig.1.8 Freidrich Murnau, still from *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror*, 1922

[44] Maxim Gorky, newspaper review of Lumière Programme at Nizhnin Novgorod Fair, 4th July 1896

In German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s, optical effects became harbingers of the uncanny in the films themselves, as filmmakers such as Robert Wiene and Friedrich Murnau exploited the shadow's status as an uncanny double. In famous stills from *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (fig.1.7) by Wiene and Willy Hameister, and *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror* (fig.1.8) by Murnau, shadows of the protagonists are seen in profile. Vampires, famously, do not project shadows, so we must conclude that the shadow at the top of the stairs in *Nosferatu* is the vampire himself, moving in a dematerialised form. For Stoichita, the shadow 'is Nosferatu "himself", a "tentacular polyp, translucent, without substance, a virtual phantom." He inhabits a subterranean world of doors, corridors and stairs, a world structured along the lines of the Freudian unconscious.'[45]

Similarly, in the still of Dr Caligari, 'the shadow, an external image, reveals what is taking place *inside* the character, what the person *is*.'[46] In other words, the shadow seems to reveal what the person is suppressing: the figure of the Doctor holding a book appears earnest, if not a little intense, but the profile he casts on the wall, with its jutting jaw and grasping hand, seems more brutal and evil. As it turns out, the film's scenario is the fantasy of the narrator who is later revealed to be an inmate in an asylum. The shadow is a 'projection' in more ways than one: as well as an effect of the light, it is (it is implied) a paranoid delusion. It is also, of course, a filmic projection. For Stoichita, the 'meta-poetic message of the shadow is unequivocal: it is a metaphor, or more precisely, a hyperbole of the key medium of Expressionist cinema: the "close-up",'[47] (that is to say, the penetrating psychological shot). The allegorical relation between the shadow and the hidden world of the unconscious was taken up explicitly by Expressionist filmmakers, then, but the connection was also implicit in more formalist artistic practices.

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[45] Ibid., 152
[46] Ibid., 150
[47] Ibid., 152

Ostranenie

In the 1920s and 1930s a number of photographers associated with the Dadaist, Surrealist and Constructivist groups, such as Josef Albers (fig. 1.9), Alexander Rodchenko (figs. 1.10 and 1.11) and László Moholy-Nagy (fig. 1.12), centred shadows and reflections in their photographs.

Techniques included idiosyncratic angles (one popular device was to look down from a rooftop, transforming the horizontal ground into a vertical), strategic framing (centring shadows and reflections instead of objects), and close-ups (excluding the wider context of a particular shadow or reflection). As in the previous examples of Impressionist painting and Expressionist film, when the visual field was flattened by all-over paint or mechanical eye, the reflections and shadows acquired a material presence. This pointed materialising of the usually marginal stemmed from an interest in *ostranenie* - that is, *making strange*, a technique which the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky articulated in revolutionary terms in 1917. Shklovsky's advocacy of 'defamiliarisation', was based on the belief that what one tended to see what one *expected* to see, and that social and psychological revolution could be furthered by art which 'renewed' vision and re-acquainted viewers with the world as it 'really' was. In addition, by making forms 'difficult' (i.e. difficult to understand), the process of perception itself would be brought into focus.

> Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and the length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.*[48]

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[48] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' (1917) in LT Lemon and MJ Reis (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965) repr. in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992) 277

Fig. 1.9 (left) Josef Albers, *Very Thin Ice*, n.d., gelatin silver print, 22.9 x 15 cm, The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Fig. 1.10 (below) László Moholy-Nagy, *Ascona (Schlemmer Girls on Balcony)*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 39.8 x 29.9 cm, Galerie Berinson, Berlin/Ubu Gallery, New York

Fig. 1.11 (below left) László Moholy-Nagy, *Rothenburg*, 1926-8, 39.5 x 29.5 cm, James Hyman, London

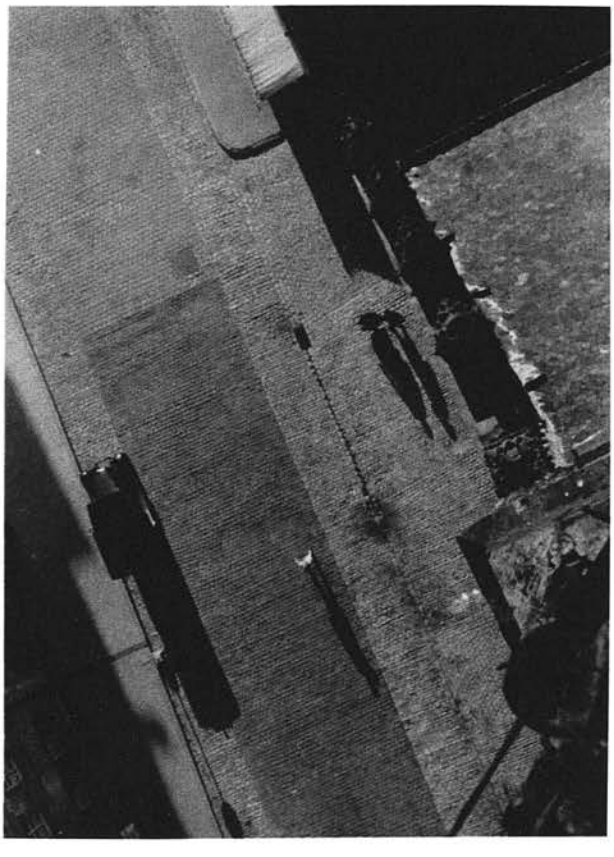

Fig. 1.12 Aleksandr Rodchenko, *The Driver,* 1933

Rodchenko concurred, saying that his point was 'to show the world from all points of view and to teach the ability to see it from all sides.'[49] The art historian Simon Watney argued that this programme, as an important part of Russian modernism, 'turned away from a metaphysical impulse towards the analysis of innate aesthetic forms, and out towards the complex relations between artists and public, and the values which are there negotiated.' [50] In other words, despite being based in formalist aesthetics, *ostranenie* was also concerned with 'social nature of perception.'[51] It was linked to the re-education of the masses.

[49] Alexander Rodchenko, cited by Simon Watney 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror', in Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 164
[50] Watney, 'Making Strange' 155 ff.
[51] Ibid., 161

Of course, because habituation and the social nature of perception would change, the same techniques of *ostranenie* could not be sustained indefinitely. Watney argued that this photographic style eventually 'collapsed into stylisation,'[52] pointing out that,

> One cannot defamiliarise that which is not in the first place familiar. The familiar is neither uniform nor heterogeneous. It is not therefore surprising that in practice the devices of "ostranenie" tended to become reified, to become seen as intrinsically correct, at which point they slid into mannerism.[53]

The significance of 'making strange'

My point is that to re-direct one's attention – to 'make strange' – did not aim simply to improve the accuracy or acuity of one's perception. As Shlovsky maintained, increasing 'the difficulty and length of perception' drew attention to the act of perception itself.[54] *Ostranenie* picked holes in the conventional, unheeded processes of vision – it demonstrated the ways in which vision was defined by expectation and directed by attention. Building on Crary's analysis of the 19th century explorations of attention, I would argue that *ostranenie* helped to expose as wishful fallacy the idea that the world was fully 'present' for an observer - or indeed that the observer was fully 'present' during the perceptual process.[55] The autonomous shadows in these photographs probe the absence at the heart of consciousness – the gap where the unconscious reigns and Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible' resides. Once the original techniques of defamiliarisation became over-familiar, were there other ways of making this gap visible?

Jolting the viewer out of his or her supposed 'habits of seeing' became established as a standard tenet of avant-garde rhetoric in both Europe and North America, and was consolidated during and after the 1960s. A resurgence of interest in Dada in late 1950s initiated a strong conceptual focus on the art object, which continued in the expanded

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[52] Ibid., 174
[53] Ibid.
[54] Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique,' 277
[55] See 23ff.

practices of minimalism and conceptual art in the 1960s. Some US artists, (such as Morris, Dan Graham and Robert Smithson), sought to draw attention to the wider context of one's physical encounter with an art work, and to underscore the role that one's expectations played in the transaction. This was certainly part of Judd's programme of 'specificity', as I discuss at length in chapter 4. Even as the utopian premises of the avant-garde receded in the 1980s, the desire to prompt an audience to 'look again' and thus, 'think again,' evidently persisted amongst many artists. As I show in the art work case-studies in chapters 6 and 7, in a contemporary culture that threatens to appropriate all objects and images as spectacle, it continues to be a political as well as aesthetic challenge to find new strategies for defamiliarisation.

I have not so far made a distinction between the rhetoric of artists and the works they have produced, but such a distinction is crucial to my thesis as a whole. Russian *ostranenie* serves as an appropriate analogy for the discovery of effects not addressed in the commentary around artwork. In the works considered here from the 1920s, reflections and shadows were 'captured' and re-presented in photographic or filmic form. By contrast, reflections and shadows in sculptural works of the 1960s were generated in real time in three dimensions, and they remained provisional and ephemeral. The exact nature of their appearance, and whether or not they were noticed by viewers, could not be controlled by the artists or considered intentional, even if the use of certain materials made shadows and reflections more likely. As I show in chapter 4, judging by interviews and critical accounts that Judd and Morris published, these artists considered reflections and shadows in their works as 'incidental', mere side-effects. This was in contrast to their slightly younger peers, Smithson and Graham, who orchestrated relays of provisional reflections in a more overt and strategic fashion. Did Smithson and Graham see, and develop, something in Judd and Morris' works that the older artists did not (could not or would not) see? I am interested in the way that artists since the 1960s have negotiated what might be called the 'inheritance' of minimalism, and how they have shone a light into the shadows and glimpsed blind spots. The little shock of recognition experienced when a hitherto hidden phenomenon emerges, and

one's previous impression is re-drawn, is a special motif in my thesis. This jolt provides a fruitful new basis for tracing art genealogies and constructing art histories, as I show in chapter 3. But first, I look in more detail at how art histories were constructed, and contested, in mid-century America.

Chapter 2
The Written Supplement

In this chapter I sketch out the history of criticism, and how it evolved in response to various waves of avant-garde practice in the US. I show how the advent of minimalism posed a particular challenge to traditional critical approaches, and how artists and critics felt it necessary to develop a more philosophically-aware form of criticism. (We see in chapter 4 that artists such as Judd and Morris were powerful thinkers and writers. They were instrumental in shaping critical interpretations of their work, and developing a theoretical understanding of what art could be. We see, too, that Rosalind Krauss, Michael Fried and other contemporary critics were well versed in new cultural theories and philosophical debates, and they drew on these in order to articulate the philosophical significance of work by minimalists and others.) I explore how the particular social context of the 1950s and 1960s enabled and nurtured these high philosophical aspirations in critical circles. I consider how this new generation of critics contested inherited models of art history; I outline, in particular, their critique of the idea of 'progress' in art history and practice. What did the 1960s generation take from older critical approaches, and what did they reject? I now reflect, briefly, on the history of criticism in the US in the decades before the 1960s, providing a historical context for these debates.

American responses to the avant-garde

When the Armory Show first introduced European Modernism to the American audience at large in 1913, what did American artists and critics make of European abstraction? Over the next couple of decades, different responses polarised the US art community. Alfred H Barr, the founding director of MOMA,[1] promoted European abstraction as the new, universal 'canon' of twentieth century art. In the exhibition catalogue to the 1936 show *Cubism and Abstract Art*, he argued that there were two main traditions of

[1] The Museum of Modern Art in New York opened to the public in 1929

Abstract Art - Cubism and Expressionism - which had arisen out of Impressionism. This curatorial articulation of art history, illustrated with a diagram showing 'The Development of Abstract Art,' (fig. 2.1) pictured it as a kind of evolution, a pseudo-biological 'begetting.'[2] The implication was that all future avant-garde art would extend from these forebears.

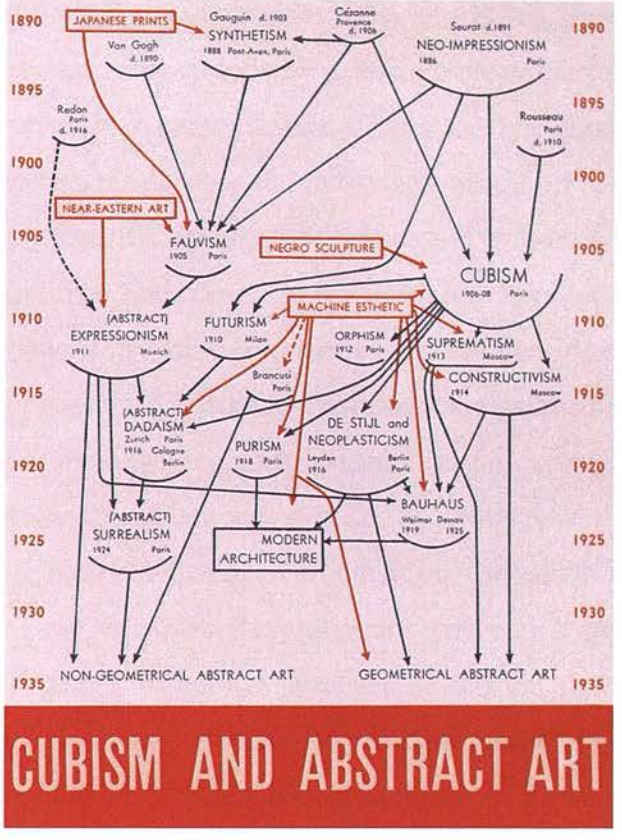

Fig. 2.1 Alfred H Barr Jr. 'The Development of Abstract Art,' 1936, on the front cover of *Cubism and Abstract* Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

[2] Cubism and subsequent geometric and Constructivist forms, he suggested, had emerged out of Cézanne and Seurat: 'This current may be described as intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometrical, rectilinear and classical in its austerity and dependence upon logic and calculation.' In contrast, Expressionism and Surrealism had come out of Gauguin and his circle: 'intuitional and emotional rather than intellectual; organic or biomorphic rather than geometrical in its forms; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative rather than structural, and romantic rather than classical in its exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational.' Alfred H Barr 'Cubism and Abstract Art', repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art In Theory,* 363

In contrast, Holger Cahill, the director of the Federal Art Project,[3] was keen to promote an American 'vernacular' regionalism that consolidated itself around the American experience - resisting traditional 19th century academic art on the one hand, and Modernism on the other, (both of which he saw as 'essentially "alien" imports'.)[4]

Both sides of the debate shared an assumption that art had the potential to change perceptions and attitudes. The underlying question was which style would prompt that change most effectively – abstraction, with its challenging and radical new vision, or vernacular social realism, a more accessible means of conveying radical messages? Ferocious debates within the organized Left between the wars made it increasingly problematic for artists in France and Britain, as well as the US, to reconcile artistic and political radicalism. In the 1930s, the Popular Front (in Europe and the US) and the American Artists' Congress followed Stalin's cultural edicts, and came down in opposition to artistic experimentation, condemning it as elitist, decadent and of limited use in conveying consciousness-raising propaganda. In response, such Stalinist authoritarianism was attacked by Trotsky, who proposed a more libertarian approach to cultural practice in an article he co-wrote with Diego Rivera and Andre Breton, 'Towards a New Revolutionary Art,' which appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1938. Together the authors protested against the 'shameful negation of principles of art' that prescribed the themes of art 'in the guise of so-called reasons of state.'[5] Instead, they demanded '*complete freedom for art.*'[6] Freedom was a loaded term that sought to re-connect with the revolutionary origins of communism. Although they promoted experimentation in art, Trotsky *et al* did not intend to absolve artists of specific social responsibility. They re-iterated the view that 'the supreme task of art in our epoch is to

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[3] The Federal Art project was a scheme within the Works Progress Administration, part of the New Deal drawn up by F D Roosevelt in 1934 to provide employment on public schemes during the Depression. It ran until 1943.

[4] Jonathan Harris 'Modernism and Culture in the USA' in Paul Wood et al, eds., *Modernism in Dispute: Art after the Forties*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Open University, 1993), 17

[5] Andre Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky, 'Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', *Partisan Review*, IV, no 1, New York, Fall 1938, reprinted in Harrison and Wood, *Art In Theory*,527-8

[6] Ibid., 528 (original emphasis)

take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution.'[7] But, they argued, this was best achieved through artistic innovation.[8]

Back in New York, who was making a case for the radical potential of abstraction? Meyer Schapiro (1904-1996), Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978) and Clement Greenberg (1909-1994), were sophisticated and sensitive writers whose contributions to journals *Partisan Review* and *The Nation* from the 1930s onwards, helped to establish art criticism as a professional practice for the first time. All three were part of an exceptional grouping of New York Jewish intellectuals. They argued initially from Marxist positions, but eventually moved away from orthodox Marxism to develop distinct philosophies in the post-war period. Schematically-speaking, their different critical approaches can be described as social/political (Schapiro), existential (Rosenberg), and analytical (Greenberg). These became important models for the generation of young artists and critics in the 1960s, as we will see shortly. (Critic Max Kozloff remarked, 'At the beginning of the decade, if you stepped into art criticism, you stepped one way or another into their [Rosenberg and Greenberg's] gravitational field.[9])

In the mid 1930s, Schapiro pointed out that there were both radical and reactionary elements in both sides of the American art scene: in the Modernist tendency towards abstraction, with its focus on the individual viewer, *and* in the socialists' call for a collective art that was politically and socially engaged. Although the modernist artist was said by some to operate 'outside' society, Schapiro argued that the work's formal character and psychological motivation still reflected the social conditions of its production. For Schapiro, those artists who imagined that simply ignoring society might work against its oppressive power were likely to be caught up instead in what was

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[7] Ibid., 528

[8] 'True art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models but rather insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time – true art is unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society. This it must do, were it only to deliver intellectual creation from the chains which bind it, and to allow all mankind to raise itself to those heights which only isolated geniuses have achieved in the past.' Ibid., 527

[9] Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974*, (New York: Soho Press, 2000) 162

essentially an individualistic, capitalist transaction; while those artists who acknowledged the interconnection of abstract art and its social context might acquire the ability and the means to affect that context. In other words, abstract art was not revolutionary or free *per se*, but nor did its practitioners necessarily abdicate social responsibility.[10] Similarly, Schapiro took issue with the idea that art history proceeded merely on the basis of reactions against the past, and pointed out in Marxist Quarterly in 1937 that contrary to Barr's account, representation had never been 'passive', and abstract art was no more 'pure' than any other kind of art. He argued, persuasively, that

> [...] the movement of abstract art is too comprehensive and long-prepared, too closely related to similar movements in literature and philosophy [...] to be considered a self-contained development issuing by a kind of internal logic directly from aesthetic problems. It bears within itself at almost every point the mark of the changing material and psychological conditions surrounding modern culture.[11]

As a lecturer and teacher, Schapiro went on to have a direct impact on many artists and critics who matured in the 1960s and who attended his lectures at Columbia University. His humane and open approach was, in itself, an example for aspiring critics. For Annette Michelson, 'What was important for me at Columbia was my sense that Schapiro was interested in extending the purview of the discipline into fields other than those that were traditionally art historical.'[12] He was 'generous and multi-faceted, intellectually,' and a 'non-authoritarian erudite,'[13] according to Max Kozloff. Barbara Rose considered herself to be a 'contextual historian' who had been formed by him '*entirely*.'[14] He was also Judd's professor, and his recommendation to the *Artnews* editor, Thomas Hess, led to Judd's first position as a critic.[15]

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[10] Meyer Schapiro, 'The Social Bases of Art', delivered to the first American Artists' Congress in 1936, repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 506-510

[11] Meyer Schapiro, 'The Nature of Abstract Art', Marxist Quarterly 1937, repr. J Gaiger and P Wood, eds., *Art of the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, (New Have and London: Yale University Press and the Open University, 2003) 31

[12] Newman, *Challenging Art*, 80

[13] Ibid., 53

[14] Ibid., 57

[15] James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) 35

In contrast to Schapiro's broad scholarship, Rosenberg and Greenberg both became identified as partisan champions of Abstract Expressionism. Although they deployed different terms, in Rosenberg's 'The Fall of Paris', published in *Partisan Review* in 1940, and Greenberg's 'Decline of Cubism' also published in *Partisan Review* in 1948,[16] the two critics claimed that Abstract Expressionism marked America's new dominance in Western art following the perceived 'collapse' of the avant-garde in Paris.

By 1952, Rosenberg was able to claim that new American painting kept the notion of revolution alive, at least in terms of personal imagination. Many Abstract Expressionist artists, he observed, had been liberated from their own artistic past. They had either been '"Marxists" (WPA Unions, artists' congresses); [...] trying to paint society [or] Others [...] trying to paint Art (Cubism, Post-Impressionism),'[17] and they had found that one approach was too compromised, the other too academic. For Rosenberg, 'The big moment came when it was decided to paint...just TO PAINT. The gesture on the

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[16] Rosenberg claimed that the intellectual exuberance and internationalism of Paris had finally been halted by the German occupation, though the international centres of culture (Paris) and socialism (Moscow) were already 'dead' when they came together in the Franco-Soviet pact of 1935, (when, as he put it, 'two cadavers of hope embraced farcically.') He argued that, 'the conscience of non-conformist Paris' had been paralysed artistically after the 1920s by the more pressing cause of anti-fascism. The resulting Popular Front 'compromise' was helpless to do much: 'Fascism [they found] was not to be stopped by clichés.' (Harold Rosenberg 'The Fall of Paris,' *Partisan Review*, 1940, revised and published in Harold Rosenberg, *Tradition of the New*, (London and New York: 1962) repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 544-5). Rosenberg concluded that in the face of Fascism, 'another Modernism' was required. Greenberg, in his essay, 'Decline of Cubism', identified cubism as the style that has 'changed and determined the complexion of Western art as radically as Rennaissance naturalism once did.' It was 'the only vital style of our time, the one best able to convey contemporary feeling and the only one capable of supporting a tradition which will survive into the future and form new artists.' Yet, he lamented, its early European pioneers had been 'demoralized' and their art degraded in the recent 'time of disasters.' Radical artists engaged in experiment needed 'so much more nerve than the conservatives [who simply stick to known, sanctioned forms] in order to keep a course that, guided by the real insights of the age, leads into unknown territory.' Radical art, Greenberg suggested, floated unconsciously on optimism, which, in the case of the Parisians, had drained away after the First World War to the point where in the early 1930s 'the social, emotional and intellectual substructure of cubism began crumbling fast.' In contrast, he observed, American art had been boosted by prosperity at home, and the five years preceding 1948 had seen an impressive rise in its energy and quality. Indeed, he claimed, 'the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the centre of gravity of industrial production and political power.' (Clement Greenberg, 'The Decline of Cubism', *Partisan Review*, March 1948, repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 570-72).

[17] Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *ARTNews*, LI, New York, Dec 1952, repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 581,582

canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value – political, aesthetic, moral.'[18] That is, what Rosenberg saw as the Abstract Expressionists' impulse towards 'liberation' – their 'revolution against the given' - was psychological rather than social or political. Here, the notion of 'freedom' derived as much from existentialism as it did from revolutionary socialism. As far as Rosenberg was concerned, the contemporary artist accepts 'as real only that which he [sic] is in the process of creating,' prompting, in Kierkegaard's words, 'the anguish of the aesthetic.'[19] Rosenberg (who also wrote poetry) thus concentrated on the 'psychology of creation', not the psychology of the artist as a person, but 'the revelation contained in the act [of making the painting].'[20] His lyrical, subjective accounts of alienation and anxiety appealed particularly to the literary poet-critics of the 1960s scene such as Peter Schjeldahl and Carter Ratcliff. Max Kozloff too, claimed he felt closer to Rosenberg than he did to Greenberg.

Greenberg retained the Marxist commitment to historical development, and argued that abstraction was itself a kind of evolution in consciousness. He, like Barr, constructed a story in which the European 'drive' to abstraction had eventually been taken up by American artists. Serge Guilbaut and others have since pointed out that the US critics' hostility towards Europe may have also been the product of a growing impatience with European conflicts and the ongoing anxiety that a third world war might still break out there.[21] Whatever the case, Greenberg did not address particular political considerations in his essays, but argued that political pressures were inimical to 'good' art. Greenberg explored (and, to all intents and purposes, adhered to) the notion that 'purely plastic or

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[18] Ibid., 581, 583

[19] Ibid., 584. Kierkergaard (1813-1855) was a Danish theologian and philosopher, famed for his anti-Hegelianism, and regarded by many as a progenitor of modern Existentialism.

[20] Ibid., 581, 582

[21] 'The fact that Greenberg launched his attack when he did was not unrelated to certain political events and to the pre-war atmosphere that had existed in New York since January of that year. The threat of a third world war was openly discussed in the press; and the importance accorded by the government to the passage of the European Recovery Plan reinforced the idea that Europe - France and Italy - was about to topple into the Soviet camp. What would become of Western civilization?' Serge Guilbaut, 'The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde,' 1980, repr. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, eds., *Art in Modern Culture*, (London: Phaidon, 1992) 247

abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count.'[22] The origins of this judgement lay in the powerful argument against 'kitsch' which Greenberg had presented in a 1939 essay, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. His equation of kitsch with the trite entertainments of commercial culture on the one hand and with tired academicism in art on the other, was widely influential. (I will argue later that the critique of 'pictorial' values in the anti-illusionism debate of the 1960s was prompted by their perceived relation to both entertainment and academicism, a relation that Greenberg was one of the first to articulate). Anticipating the arguments of Theodor Adorno,[23] Greenberg asserted that difficult 'avant-garde' work provided the only cultural resistance to the pervasive presence of kitsch. Kitsch did not question itself; it was a form of seduction. In contrast, the mark of the seriousness of an avant-garde work was its 'self-criticism'.

A painter himself, Greenberg brought a sharp analytical eye to abstract forms, and he often attributed the significance of particular details to an artist's ongoing dialogue with the general 'progress' of his or her art.[24] This view of 'progress' in the work of individual artists was a microcosmic version of Greenberg's wider grand narrative: his teleology of Modernism was a development of the positivist model of art history as a story, (also deployed in the 1950s by Gombrich).[25] To Barr's vision of pseudo-

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[22] Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon,' *Partisan Review*, VII, no 4 New York, July-August, 1940, repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 558

[23] Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) was a sociologist and philosopher closely associated with the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of thought. He emigrated to the US in 1938 and stayed until the end of WW2. His critique of the 'culture industry' was widely influential, and I return to it in chapter 7.

[24] Consider, for instance, the way Greenberg reads certain painterly details as evidence of strategies by Newman and Rothko to move beyond the mannerisms of Abstract Expressionism: 'With [Barnett] Newman and [Mark] Rothko, temperaments that might strike one as being natively far more painterly than [Clifford] Still's administer themselves copious antidotes in the form of the rectilinear. The rectilinear is kept ambiguous, however: Rothko fuzzes and melts all his dividing lines; Newman will insert an uneven edge as foil to his ruled ones. Like Still, they make a show of studiedness, as if to demonstrate their rejection of mannerisms which have become inseparable now from rapid brush and knife-handling. Newman's occasional brushy edge, and the torn but exact one left by Still's knife, are there as if to advertise both their awareness and their repudiation of the easy effects of spontaneity.' (Clement Greenberg, 'After Abstract Expressionism,' *Art International*, VI, no. 8, Lugano, October 1962, repr. Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 767).

[25] In *The Story of Art*, EH Gombrich (1901-2001) considered art practice as a kind of language that evolved as it was adapted to the exigencies of different cultural contexts. Gombrich had a mutually influential friendship with the philosopher of science, Karl Popper (1902-1994), who famously argued that scientists proceeded by falsifying the findings of their forebears.

evolutionary progress in recent art, Greenberg added notions of adaptation and survival of the fittest. He asserted that the survival of art as a discipline, as a critical force in culture, and as 'good' art (which, as far as he was concerned, amounted to the same thing), depended on the artists engaging in a self-conscious dialogue with the past, as if they were scientists building on past discoveries.[26]

As we will see shortly, Greenberg's 'story' of art was problematic for many critics and artists in the 1960s, both in principle and in its application. (His theory excluded Surrealism and Dada from the canon entirely, just at a time when American artists were revisiting the Dada of Duchamp, an important part of their own avant-garde history.) Nevertheless Greenberg's close and supposedly 'objective' readings of artworks appealed to a number of young critics, particularly the historian/philosopher/critics, Fried (b. 1939), Krauss (b.1940), Barbara Rose (b.1940) and Annette Michelson, who all contributed to *Art International* in the early 1960s.[27] Although each later broke with his ideas, they remembered the impact that his writings had on them. According to Rose, Greenberg was widely resented, and had 'lost his power' in the early sixties, but he was returned to a powerful position 'by graduate art historians who appreciated his clarity and his culture. [...] We [Fried, Krauss and Rose] saw that at least this man, uniquely in

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[26] 'Modernist art belongs to the same specific cultural tendency as modern science... self-criticism in modernist art... has altogether been a question of practice, immanent to practice... Certain inclinations, certain affirmation and emphases, and certain refusals and abstinences as well, seem to become necessary simply because the way to stronger, more expressive art lies through them.' (Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', 1960, repr. Frascina and Harris, *Art in Modern Culture*, 312).

[27] *Art International*, established in 1956, was edited by James Fitzsimmons. Despite being an American magazine, it was published in Lugano, Switzerland, and had a European circulation as well. It was more lavish and substantial than other art publications - it featured more in the way of reproductions (albeit in black and white). It included articles by Greenberg (a friend of Fitzsimmons), who had stopped writing criticism by this point, and was therefore not often available to students elsewhere. Max Kozloff (who had been contributing columns to *The Nation*) was asked to write the New York letter in 1961. On the strength of their assignments for *Arts*, Fried and Michelson were approached by Fitzsimmons to write, and Fried also passed on some pieces by Rose and Krauss. Ultimately though, Barbara Rose recalled, these writers became disillusioned with Fitzsimmons because he was 'cynical' – pressuring them to review certain shows because the 'ads were paying for the reviews.' (Rose, in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 61) Rose rebelled and went to write for *Artforum* instead - a new, initially obscure journal published on the West Coast – taking a number of her *Art International* colleagues with her.

the world of art criticism, had a philosophical grounding to his theories.'[28] Not only that, but his style was refreshingly specific, Krauss recalled:

> Once I started reading Greenberg, I had a breakthrough because, until then, I had been very frustrated by the vagueness and unverifiability of *opinion* that characterized the writing of Sydney Janis, Tom Hess, Harold Rosenberg,[29] and all of those people [...] A description you could check, somehow, and say, "Yes, I see that." And then an argument about why seeing that might make a difference.[30]

Fried agreed:

> Clem's stance was always "Look, this is how it works." [...] The writing is straightforward, powerful, absolutely perfect for what it has to do [...] I think the nature of art writing at its best is that good description is always *already* explanation, at least up to a point. In Rosenberg there's no description whatsoever. There isn't a descriptive moment, there's never a moment when the object appears.[31]

It could be argued that the style of Greenberg's writing foreshadowed Judd's in many respects. They shared a terse tone, deceptively simple observation, and philosophical insight, and although Judd, as we will see, had misgivings about Greenberg's wider project, he could not but approve its basis in *looking*.

Artists writing

Whereas Greenberg and Rosenberg were seen to speak for American artists in the 1940s and 1950s, by the 1960s artists such as Judd, Morris and Sol LeWitt were speaking for themselves. It is worth pausing momentarily to consider the intellectual and cultural

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[28] Ibid., 165

[29] Hess was editor of *Art News*, which had continued to champion the New York School even in the midst of weaker second and third generation imitators, with 'belle-lettriste' writings from several poet-critics like Rosenberg and John Ashbery. As the magazine ran fewer reproductions, more 'descriptive' writing was required. In the late 1950s and early 1960s younger literary figures such as Peter Schjeldahl and Carter Ratcliff gravitated towards it, but for others like Fried, Rose, Krauss and Michelson the writing lacked analytical rigour.

[30] Newman, *Challenging Art*, 77

[31] Ibid,, 165

backgrounds of these artists, and to note the range of practitioners and critics they associated with.

Judd entered higher education through the GI Bill after a stint in the army in the late 1940s. He graduated in philosophy from Columbia University in 1953, having studied John Dewey and Henri Bergson, among others. He went back to Columbia in 1957 to study with Meyer Schapiro and Rudolph Wittkower for a master's degree in art history, which he completed in 1962. To earn money, Judd worked as an art critic from the late 1950s, contributing to *Artnews*, *Art International,* and most regularly, *Arts Magazine*.[32] Judd was married in 1964 to choreographer and dancer Julie Finch, who worked with the Judson Dance Theater (they divorced in 1979). They named their son Flavin (b 1968), after Dan Flavin, whom Judd had met in 1962, and their daughter Rainer (b.1970), after choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer.

Robert Morris initially studied engineering and art in Kansas, San Francisco and Oregon in the late 1940s and 1950s. He moved to New York in 1960, and continued his art studies under Ad Reinhardt and EC Goosen, submitting his master's thesis on Constantin Brancusi in 1966. At the same time, he choreographed and performed in a number of pieces for Judson Dance Theater, along with his then wife Simone Forti (they divorced in 1961), and Rainer, with whom he lived after 1964. Between 1966 and 1975,

[32] *Arts Magazine* was an older magazine that had changed its name from *Arts Digest* in the mid 1950s. It was edited by Hilton Kramer, who was regarded as quite conservative, although he gave the writers a degree of freedom that they appreciated. Although later they were forced by the growing number of exhibitions, to be selective, before 1961 the magazine had tried to be comprehensive, providing coverage of every single show in New York and not favouring one type of work in particular. Similarly, its writers held a wide range of sometimes incompatible positions. Sidney Tillim, who wrote full-time on the magazine, became known for his enthusiasm for Pop Art and realism. Judd, despite reviling Tillim and often disagreeing with Kramer, was allowed to review the shows he wanted. Fried, who was in London studying, was appointed London critic in 1961 at the age of 20. His acquaintance with and promotion of Anthony Caro began at this time. Michelson, the Paris correspondent from 1957 until 1963, felt that *Arts* writers were fighting 'an interesting battle against a kind of pervasive, celebratory idiom' that appeared elsewhere. (interviewed in *Challenging Art*, p. 40) Later, in the mid 1960s, *Arts* published Mel Bochner's reviews of Judd and LeWitt, and his discussions of 'Serial Art'; Graham's *Homes for America*, and a number of essays by Smithson.

Artforum[33] published a number of major essays by Morris, and during this time he was close to contributing editors Michelson and Krauss. [34]

Sol LeWitt (b.1928) received a BFA from Syracuse University in 1949, and after serving in the Korean War, attended the Cartoonists and Illustrators School (later known as The School of Visual Arts) in New York until 1953. Subsequently he undertook graphic work for *Seventeen Magazine* and in the office of the architect I.M. Pei, and then in the early 1960s worked on reception and the book counter at the Museum of Modern Art, where he met artists Dan Flavin (1933-1996), Robert Ryman (b.1930) and Robert Mangold (b.1937), as well as the budding critic Lucy Lippard (b.1937) who worked in the library. Lippard and LeWitt went on to found *Printed Matter* in 1976 in order to publish and distribute artists' books.

Judd, Morris and LeWitt's immersion in the diverse creative contexts of journalism, dance, graphic design and architecture suggests that they were aware of wider negotiations and articulations of social space. Their most famous articles, however, were specific in their focus on art. Judd's 'Specific Objects' (written in 1964 and

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[33] John Coplans and Philip Leider established *Artforum* in 1962 with the aim of encouraging the nascent 'scene' on the West coast and providing some kind of critical forum for it. But by the mid 1960s, their focus was increasingly drawn to what they perceived to be the superior quality and energy of work in New York. Barbara Rose was married to Frank Stella, and they had initiated a salon of sorts in their tenement in lower Madison Avenue (attended regularly by Rauschenberg, Judd, Oldenberg, Johns, Chamberlain, Reinhardt, Newman, Cage, Fried and Greenberg - see Newman, *Challenging Art*, 145-148). As well as being a key factor in bringing the *Art International* crowd to *Artforum*, Rose invited Leider into their salon and introduced him to the New York scene, thus helping to secure the magazine's move to New York in 1967. Leider was also inspired by his correspondence with, and growing admiration for, Fried. As a result of these acquaintances with Rose and Fried and the others, Leider became more ambitious about 'creating a discipline of art criticism.' (Ibid., 150). He was determined to provide 'analysis while everyone else is frugging in front of paintings; evaluation while everyone else is clinking glasses and comparing mini-skirts; depth while everyone else is splashing on the surface.' (Philip Leider, letter to Sidney Tillim, 1967, Newman, *Challenging Art*, 4). There were many major contributions by artists, including Robert Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture' essays, Sol LeWitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', some remarks from the 'spleenish journal' of Dan Flavin, and Robert Smithson's 'Monuments of Passaic' and 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan.'

[34] Newman, *Challenging Art*, 12

published in *Arts Yearbook 8* in 1965)[35], and Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture' (published in *Artforum* in 1966 and included in Gregory Battcock's *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* in 1968) were, and remain, essential articles on the work of their era, while Lewitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (also published in *Artforum* in 1967) and 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' (first published in *0-9* in New York and *Art-Language* in Coventry, UK, in 1969) set out the conceptual underpinning of his own particular brand of minimalism.

Alongside younger critics, these artists were engaged in a particularly lively and self-conscious dialogue with developments in philosophy and art criticism. Apart from Schapiro and Greenberg, 1950s criticism had been based largely on aesthetic appreciation and/or existential empathy, which were patently inadequate for dealing with minimalism. At a basic level, Judd, Morris and LeWitt produced detailed and definitive statements about their work and the work of their peers because it was new and unfamiliar, and needed explaining. The newness of this work – its oedipal rejection of what had gone before – was an essential part of the project too, and this was most effectively communicated in discourse. In this sense, these articles staked out particular polemical positions, and might be related to the avant-garde manifestoes of the early 20th century – from Tristan Tzara's 'Dada Manifesto 1918' and Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's 'Purism' (1920), to Rivera, Breton and Trotsky's 'Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' (1938), mentioned earlier. But whereas LeWitt wrote primarily as an artist, Morris and Judd wrote as critics. The tone of their statements was often critical/analytical as much as declamatory, and observational rather than consistently factional. Taken together, their writings have tended to illuminate the inherent tension between description and prescription often found within the manifesto mode. On the one hand, LeWitt was engaged in defining a category of practice. On the other, Judd was intent on critiquing such fixed categorical groupings (as I discuss in the next chapter). Morris, meanwhile,

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[35] *Arts Yearbook* was produced by *Arts Magazine*. Judd recalls that the article was written a year before it was published. Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959-1975*, (Nova Scotia and New York: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and New York University Press, 1975,) 2nd edn, 2005, VII

seemed to be caught between commenting on an evolving situation and locating his own evolving practice within it.

It is worth asking why these artists' writings have come to be regarded as essential supplements to their work - indeed, as a defining part of their practice. The sophistication of their writing was undoubtedly important. The gradually changing status of critical discourse in relation to art was also a factor. This was the first generation of artists to be educated at university, rather than at art college. Both Judd and Morris were trained by prominent thinkers as well as practicing artists. As a matter of course, the undergraduate and postgraduate education they underwent provided advanced training in 'intellectual, abstract and conceptual' thought. Indeed, following dramatic shifts in art instruction and higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, there was much wider scope for intellectual debates about art amongst audiences. A growing section of the art audience in the 1960s had had similar training, and was therefore open to an art practice that consisted, in part, of rigorous self-analysis. The historian Howard Brick characterized this broader educational context as the 'socialization of the intellect:' 'Socialization was a trend especially marked during the 1960s in intellectual life and the arts, where institutions of higher learning and aesthetic experience were open to, and intended to address, a vaster public than ever before.'[36]

The academy expanded rapidly from the late 1950s onward, an expansion instigated by the GI Bill reforms in 1952 (which benefited many artists directly),[37] and furthered in the 1960s by America's unprecedented affluence and Cold War ambition.[38] The new academy had importance for artists on a number of levels:

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[36] Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1

[37] Instead of tuition payments being made directly to colleges, veterans were paid a monthly stipend to cover tuition, fees and expenses.

[38] Public investment in the arts sector was expanding, with the establishment of the funding body National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965 under Lyndon Johnston, and the building of many new municipal arts centres, like New York's Lincoln Centre opened in 1966.

> the growing tendency of artists to support themselves partly or fully by academic appointments, and the multifold increase throughout the 1960s in the number of fine-arts degrees awarded, made it clear that colleges and universities were becoming a principal center of cultural as well as intellectual life.[39]

Brick describes the 'tidal wave of new students' in the 1960s, the creation of many new institutions, the addition of branch campuses to existing ones, the surge in government investment in research, and the increasing seriousness of much academic engagement.[40]

The enhanced role of the intellect in both public and private American life empowered many people. It also posed new intellectual and political challenges, as Brick makes clear:

> By inviting more of the American people into a common social life, this trend had a democratic dimension to it, but the institutions it created often seemed like ponderous, impersonal forces than means of popular involvement in social affairs. Likewise, while the socializing trend provided conditions for new kinds of collective action in American life, it accompanied a growing capitalist economy that still emphasized the action of lone individuals. These were some of the contradictions of an affluent society, posing acute problems for the thinkers of the time: the prospects of abundance opened vistas of social change but also reinforced a sense of personal alienation, aroused hopes for a greater degree of democratic participation in public life but also suggested a growing concentration of effective power in American life.[41]

Brick points to, for example, the militaristic and 'economistic' thrust behind much of the academic expansion in the 1960s, while noting the parallel appearance of enlightened resistance to such functionality, primarily amongst 'liberal arts' programs. The study of

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[39] Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 11

[40] 'According to Christopher Jencks and David Reisman in *The Academic Revolution* (1968) the early 1960s witnessed dramatic growth in the proportion of entering students who declared an intention to undertake graduate studies after finishing their four college years, and thus, with college performance a priority, the lackadaisical attitude of the 'gentleman's C' became outmoded. The academic model of training in formal scholarship rendered baccalaureate programs 'more intellectual, abstract and conceptual,' and the proportion of undergraduates engaged in business and pre-professional programs declined while the liberal arts major, both for men and women, became increasingly predominant.' Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 10, referring to Christopher Jencks and David Reisman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968)

[41] Ibid., 1

humanities extended beyond the limitations and barrenness of a technocratic culture. Analytical approaches were valued for their own sake, not for functional ends. This 'militated against crude utilitarian views of knowledge,' and was the starting point for 'a brewing critique of industrial, military and bureaucratic uses of information.'[42]

Like Brick, the art historian and philosopher Peter Osborne attributed the intellectual commitment of artists in the 1960s to 'the expansion and transformation of art education during the 1960s, in a context of growing cultural and political radicalism.'[43] Artists took aim at what they saw as the complacency of the existing artworld establishment: its anti-intellectualism and its social conservatism. In his account of the role of philosophy in the development of conceptual art, Osborne described how a radical shift in the relations between art practice and art criticism in the first half of the 1960s (preparing the way for the emergence of conceptual art in the latter half of the decade) was part of this critique.[44] 'Philosophy was *the means* for [the] usurpation of [critics'] critical power by a new generation of artists.'[45] Engaging with 'definitional questions' in art was an attempt to 'transfer the cultural authority' of philosophical production to artistic production, 'thereby both bypassing and trumping existing forms of art critical discourse.'[46] Ironically, considering Greenberg's passionate commitment to the autonomy of the art object, the discursive conditions for this shift in authority were contained within his own analysis: he had appropriated 'an explicitly philosophical idea' from Kant to characterize Modernist art as 'self-critical' and showed it was involved in

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[42] Ibid., 10-11

[43] Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy' in eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird, *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) 50

[44] The relationship between Conceptual art and philosophical discourse in the USA and Britain was dynamic, wild and not infrequently paradoxical. That there was a relationship at all was the result of changes in the relations between art practice and art criticism which took place in the first half of the 1960s, prior to the emergence of Conceptual art, strictly speaking, as a self-conscious form [...] these changes were an integral part of the development (and crisis) of Greenbergian Modernist criticism in its interaction with new – especially 'Minimalist' – work... They involved both an increasing emphasis within art critical discourse upon definitional questions about the essential nature or legitimate form of art-works, and a growing willingness on the part of artists themselves to engage in such discourse, both as a productive resource for practice and as a means of maintaining control over the representation of their projects within the artworld. Ibid., 49

[45] Ibid. (original emphasis)

[46] Ibid., 50

establishing the parameters of its own medium.[47] As artists like Judd and Morris were so well equipped to address 'definitional questions' in discursive as well as artistic terms, they set the direction for later conceptual artists to pursue a '*definitively philosophical* conception of art practice.'[48]

Anti-evolution and anti-progress

Many young artists and critics in the 1960s were unconvinced by the Marxist/Hegelian model of history. The dominance of logical positivism, and in particular its conception of 'progress', came under increasingly sceptical scrutiny in the culture at large. Thomas Kuhn, for instance, argued that scientists, rather than proceeding by developing and critiquing the problems of the previous generation, actually sought to fit their ideas to a prevailing paradigm which was liable to shift relatively suddenly.[49] Progress in the Greenberg/Barr model of art history was explicitly associated with the former scientific model, and was thus open to criticism on a similar basis – that it did not accord with the reality of art practice. Judd complained that 'Greenberg and Fried are of course wrong about mainstream history or development. It's too simple and, as Barbara Reise said, it's nineteenth-century philosophy. Most ideas of history are simplistic, archaic and destructive.'[50] Smithson was sceptical about the whole language of problem-solving in art, protesting that '[artistic] problems are unnecessary because problems represent values that create the illusion of purpose.'[51] The problem with Greenberg's model was that the evaluation of individual works or practices was subordinated to the overall teleology that he sought to impose. Judd suggested that critics like Greenberg, through their 'naïve' attempts to impose a 'universal style', 'slowly destroy the work they're protecting'[52] because they are forced to value second rate work that adheres to this style

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 56
[49] Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-1996). See *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962
[50] Donald Judd, 'Complaints: part I' *Studio International*, April 1969, repr., Judd, *Complete Writings*, (1975), 198
[51] Robert Smithson, 'Entropy and the New Monuments,' 1966, repr., Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996) 11-12
[52] Judd, 'Complaints: part I', 197

over first rate work that breaks with it.[53] Rose noted, and lamented, the 'schism' in Greenberg's writing when he shifted from analysis and interpretation, to history and teleology: 'when [it] becomes not an analytical tool but a way of picking the winners.'[54]

Despite Greenberg's significant influence in the critical establishment, his theories had fallen out of step with artistic production as his prescriptions had begun to produce the wrong 'winners'. The picture of the purposeful evolution of art conceived by Greenberg could not accommodate serial paradigms that suggested unending permutation rather than historical development. The Neo-Dada strategy of deadpan repetition (emerging in the 1950s with Jasper Johns' Number Paintings, for example) was deployed with increasing gusto in the 1960s, adapted by many of the artists associated with Minimalism as well as Pop artists and Fluxus performers. It was difficult to argue that artists who dealt with serial permutations, and did not 'develop' or 'progress' within their own practice, would pass the torch 'on' to anyone else, as Greenbergian positivist art history expected, and as artists supposedly moving 'towards' Abstract Expressionism had done.

In an *Artforum* article from 1966, Dan Flavin (1933-1996) recognized that his repetitive, modular forms (referred to here as 'situation installation') precluded such development:

> I know now that I can reiterate any part of my fluorescent light system as adequate. Elements of parts of that system simply alter in situation installation. They lack the look of history. I sense no stylistic or structural development of any significance within my proposal - only shifts in partitive emphasis – modifying and addable without intrinsic change.
>
> All my diagrams, even the oldest, seem applicable again and continually. It is as though my system synonymizes its past, present and future states without incurring a loss of relevance. It is curious to feel self-denied of a progressing development if only for a few years.[55]

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[53] 'I don't think, for example, that the work of Johns and Rauschenberg is so momentous. But it's good and I am not at all inclined to rank them below every last abstract artist.' Judd, 'Complaints: part I,' 197

[54] Rose in Newman, *Challenging Art*, 169

[55] Dan Flavin, 'Some Remarks... excerpts from a spleenish journal,' *Artforum*, 4:4, December 1966, 27

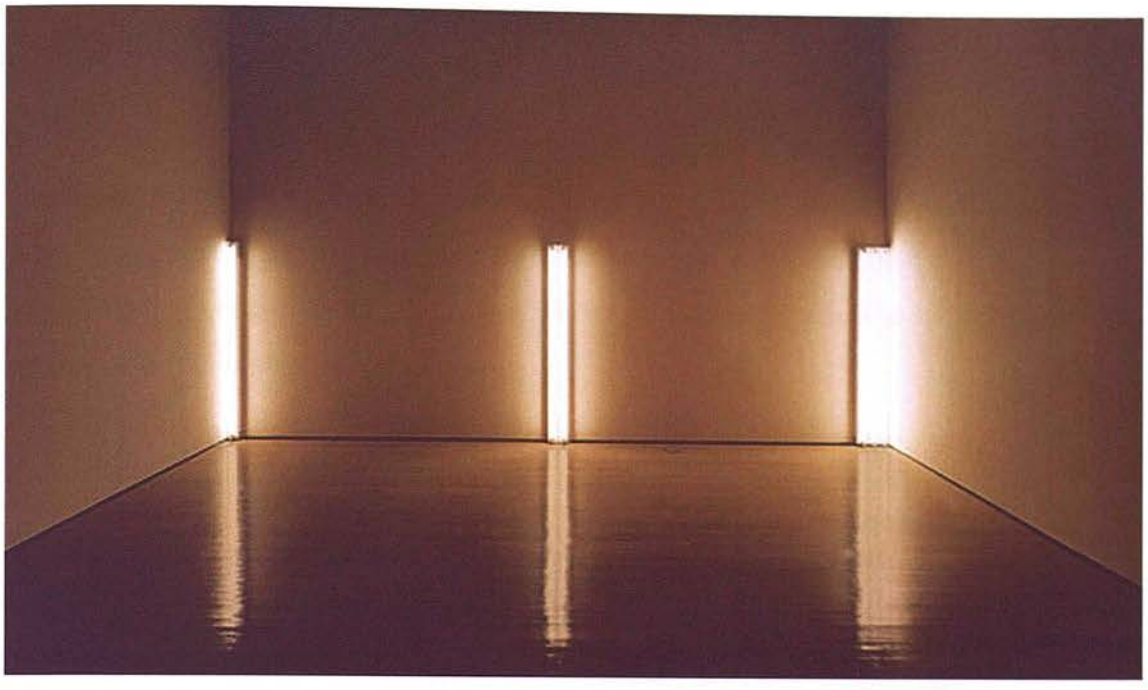

Fig. 2.2 Dan Flavin, *the nominal three (to William of Ockham),* 1963, Daylight fluorescent light, edition 2/3, 6-ft. fixtures, h. 72 inches (182.9 cm); overall dimensions variable. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Panza Collection, 91.3698. © 2007 Stephen Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: David Heal

Flavin presented his works, (see fig. 2.2) and, for a while, his whole oeuvre, as endlessly extendable and modifiable. No individual 'situation installation' was any more important that another, and so no work (or application of a diagram) should be construed as a 'solution' to a calculation that could then be used for the next calculation, as Greenberg advocated with his positivist model of art history.

For Judd's part, he developed what William Agee called a 'lexicon,' comprised of 'unit, series, site.' Having invented a small number of strategic forms and devised particular ways of relating them, Judd continued to work with them throughout his career. Agee quoted Judd's comment to John Coplans, 'I don't have too great a sense of progress, of change. I like to work back and forth.'[56] In other words, although Judd might observe something in one installation that contributed to the parameters of another, these

[56] William C Agee, 'Unit, Series, Site: A Judd Lexicon' in *Art in America*, vol 63, no 3, May-June 1975, 40, citing an interview in John Coplans, *Don Judd,* (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1971), 44

discoveries were not channelled into making new forms, but into adapting and re-presenting the same forms in new materials and situations.

Smithson seized on the idea of anti-progress as a defining aspect of the work of a number of artists of the period (including Flavin and Judd) in his essay 'Entropy and the New Monuments' (1966), which deployed an associative and imaginative critical style (an interesting counter-model to the analytical criticism of Morris and Judd). Many of these works, he wrote,

> celebrate what Flavin calls "inactive history" or what the physicist calls "entropy" or "energy-drain." They bring to mind the Ice Age rather than the Golden Age, and would most likely confirm Vladimir Nabokov's observation that, "The future is but the obsolete in reverse".[57]

The image of crystalline accretion (as opposed to the image of botanic growth) will be important throughout the thesis. Smithson suggested that minimalist works provided a visual analogue for the second law of thermodynamics: that 'energy is more easily lost than obtained, and that in the future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into all-encompassing sameness.'[58] Smithson recalled the "blackout" that had recently afflicted the Northwestern states, and posited it as 'a preview of the future.' Strikingly, he says, the power failure engendered euphoria rather than dread.[59] In presenting structures that uncovered the universal tendency to entropy, these artists exposed the futility of progressive modernism, and destroyed the classical illusions of continuous time and space upon which notions of progress are based. 'New monuments seem to cause us to forget the future,' he wrote.[60] In choosing 'artificial materials, plastic, chrome and electric light' in place of 'natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock' artists were excluding the geological past, and paying less heed to future

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[57] Smithson, *Entropy,* 11
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

longevity. 'Both past and future are placed in an objective present.'[61] Flavin made monuments to the 'instant' and Judd's works were a 'series of motionless intervals based on an order of solids.'[62] Thus, Smithson observed, 'Time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated by many of these artists; this displacement allows the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures, or both combined.'[63] Judd's and Flavin's 'reduction of time all but annihilates the value of the notion of "action" in art.'[64] This, he claimed, put paid to the 'action-reaction syndrome' (that lay at the heart of Greenberg's teleology), considered by Marshall McLuhan to be a residual habit stemming from 'the hypnotic state of the mechanism.'[65] Wake up from the rationalistic illusion that underpins our mechanistic world view, Smithson suggested, and we learn that 'Mistakes and dead-ends often mean more to artists than any proven problem.'[66]

Artists and the delay

Smithson's judgement is borne out by the artists' descriptions of the 'delay' they experienced in understanding their own art works (and the way that later works tended to re-frame the meaning of earlier works). In his 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', LeWitt (fig. 2.3) remarks, 'The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.'[67] He suggested that, because the artist pursued a systematic process in making each piece, certain effects arose unexpectedly, but once actualised, such 'side-effects' might go on to take centre stage in a later piece:

> Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side-effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.[68]

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 12
[65] Ibid. (No reference provided for the quote from McLuhan)
[66] Ibid., 11-12
[67] Sol Lewitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', *Art-Language* , vol. 1, no. 1, Coventry, May 1969, repr., Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 838
[68] Ibid.

Fig. 2.3 Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project, I (ABCD)*, 1966, baked enamel on steel units over baked enamel on aluminum, 20" x 13' 7" x 13' 7" (50.8 x 398.9 x 398.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Agnes Gund and purchase (by exchange). © 2009 Sol LeWitt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Lewitt also argued that the artist 'may not necessarily understand his own art.' An artist's perception of their work was 'neither better nor worse than that of others,' and therefore the ideas contained within a work might speak to other artists: 'One artist may mis-perceive (understand it differently than the artist) a work of art but still be set off in his own chain of thought by that misconstrual.'[69]

Judd echoed some of Lewitt's points in his 1983 talk to the Yale School of Art and Architecture, (despite differences of opinion between them regarding the precise roles of the conceptual and perceptual in good art). How might art be said to communicate ideas? The 'ideas' of a work, he suggested, were inscribed in the process that made it, but that was not to say that the ideas came first and determined the outcome. He criticised critics who tended to see artistic decisions as *effects* of inherited, commonplace notions, and who therefore interrogated an artist's process in order to discover such notions within it. 'An artist is certainly not without ideas and principles but these cannot be completely formulated beforehand, before the work is developed, and then simply

[69] Ibid.

embodied.'[70] In fact, he argued, if the work is any good, then a *new* set of thoughts - tied to the experience of that work - should proceed from it.

> The aestheticians are trying to draw conclusions from the process and its results, but to me the process is first and primary, and, in a way, is the conclusion. The philosophers are proceeding inductively backwards to *a priori* conclusions. I would like to go forward from the end to the beginning of the process to *a posteriori* conclusions. Process is the beginning but the beginning always steps backwards so that rather than simply beginning, the beginning is a search for the beginning. [71]

Again like LeWitt, Judd acknowledged the necessarily delayed understanding that he had of his own work, and the necessity of seeing it completed in order to grasp what he had 'meant' in the first place.

> I can't remember all of the particular decisions which built a type of work. It's hard to recall all of the general ideas which guided those decisions. And then much is based on natural predilections, some understood, some partly, some mysterious. A few were present at the beginning, but I usually didn't recognise their importance. [72]

Of course, there is a delay in fully 'seeing' any art work until after it is finished, but it is significant that Judd contrasted the intuitive (and even blind) decision-making process with the definitive experience of looking at the final piece. What was important in the work only emerged as such in retrospect. Moreover, the ideas that did emerge remained bound to the experience - they could not be converted into something which was easy to articulate. 'But while this [process] produces art, a form of communication itself, this doesn't produce verbal communication. Decisions made in working result in art, not discrete ideas.'[73] Ideas also continued to change as new works were made – Judd often brought a new perspective to bear on old forms. A new colour combination for an old

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Judd, *Art and Architecture*, 24
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

form would change the whole history of that form. Judd's point was that the nature of the ideas or qualities associated with that form were *a posteriori*, not *a priori*.

In asserting that 'ideas' (such as they are) arose from the completed work, and were subject to change in the future as a sequence was added to, Judd pictured a delay or absence at the work's heart. This recognition of an empty space at the centre of creativity was significant in many ways. First, it articulated a dilemma for the avant-garde manifesto: what was presented as a motivating programme for making art was in fact based on a retrospective rationalisation of what had already been made. Judd was effectively questioning the viability of prescription in art. Secondly, it confirmed the central assertion of the 'intentional fallacy', which had emerged in the 1950s as part of the discourse about criticism, and was developed in the 1960s as a tenet of post-structuralism. As the intentional fallacy has obvious implications for my own project, I will explore it in some detail now. Thirdly, the conception of an empty space at the heart of meaning was also an article/effect of the deconstructionist analysis that emerged in the 1960s. One can therefore elucidate this idea further with reference to the analysis and analogies of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Deleuze (1925-1995), which I do at various points in this thesis.

The Intentional Fallacy

The literary theorist William K Wimsatt (1907-1945) and the philosopher of art and aesthetics, Monroe C Beardsley (1915-1985) were prominent American exponents of New Criticism, which advocated the close reading of texts above all other considerations. Their 1946 essay (revised in 1954) delineating the 'Intentional Fallacy', concluded that works of literature could not be judged according to what their author supposedly intended, 'Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.'[74] Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that 'the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.'

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[74] William K Wimsatt and Monroe C Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946, rev., 1954), repr., Stuart Sim, ed., *Art: Context and Value*, (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1992), 348

Rather, the inquiry ought to be focussed on the 'internal' aspects of the work: that is, the publicly available aspects of the work, 'the semantics and syntax' understood through dictionaries and literature (that is, 'all that makes a language and culture.')[75]

This argument was developed in the 1960s by Roland Barthes (1915-1980). His famous essay 'The Death of the Author' first appeared in the box-set journal *Aspen* in 1967.[76] Interestingly, it was included in an issue dedicated to minimalism, along with essays by George Kubler and Susan Sontag (to whom I will return in chapter 3). These essays were presented alongside a treasury of photographs, artwork descriptions, poems, manifestoes, phonographic recordings and films by Dada and Constructivist artists, as well as those more usually associated with minimalism.[77] In his 'The Death of the Author', Barthes concluded that

> a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[78]

According to this perspective, a work of visual art could also be described as a 'text' of cultural quotations. The form of an artwork was determined by the artist, but it fell to the viewer to draw on his or her own cultural experience and resources in 'reading' the work.

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[75] Ibid., 340

[76] The first publication of 'The Death of the Author' was in English, translated by Richard Howard, in 'The Minimalism Issue', *Aspen*, nos. 5-6, Fall-Winter 1967, edited by Brian O' Doherty. It first appeared in French in *Manteia* V, 1968.

[77] There were recordings of works by Gabo and Pevsner, Duchamp and Huelsenbeck, Beckett, Burroughs, Robbe-Grillet, Merce Cunningham, Cage, and Feldman (the last two also contributed scores); poems by Michel Butor and Dan Graham; films by Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter, Robert Rauschenberg and Morris; extensive documentation of works by LeWitt, Mel Bochner and Tony Smith. For a full account, and reproductions, of the contents, see www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/index.html

[78] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' (1967), repr., in Stephen Heath, trans., *Image - Music - Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 146

Yet the author-figure did not disappear. In a 1969 article, Foucault asked 'What is an Author?' He concurred with Wimsatt and Beardsley, and Barthes, that signs no longer 'followed' content initiated by the author, but rather generated content in the author's absence. Indeed, he described the self-reflexive writing of the day as essentially concerned with the disappearance of its author (he cited Beckett; we might also think of Robbe-Grillet):

> The writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression'; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognize its exterior deployment. This reversal transforms writing into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier. Moreover, it implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.[79]

With the apparent disappearance of a writing subject, it was clear to Foucault that 'criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships.'[80] Yet, he asked, 'what is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an "author"?'[81] Does the concept of '*écriture*' simply transpose the empirical characteristics of an author to a 'transcendental anonymity?'[82] According to Foucault, this notion that there were meanings to be uncovered in a work, even when they were not put there by the author, was still essentially a theological idea:

> In granting a primordial status to writing, do we not, in effect, simply reinscribe in transcendental terms the theological affirmation of its sacred origin or a

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[79] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author,' *Bulletin de la Societé Française de Philosophie*, 63, no. 3 (1969), repr., Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 300-301
[80] Ibid., 301
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 302

> critical belief in its creative nature? To say that writing, in terms of the particular history it made possible, is subjected to forgetfulness and repression, is this not to reintroduce in transcendental terms the religious principle of hidden meanings (which require interpretation) and the critical assumption of implicit significations, silent purposes and obscure contents (which give rise to commentary)? Finally, is not the conception of writing as absence a transposition into transcendental terms of the religious belief in a fixed and continuous tradition or the aesthetic principle that proclaims the survival of the works as a kind of enigmatic supplement of the author beyond his own death?[83]

Thus, Foucault was concerned that the disappearance of the author was actually 'held in check by the transcendental.'[84] For Foucault this re-emergence of the transcendental was symptomatic of the desire to 'situate our present discontinuities within the historical and transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century.' He, on the other hand, wanted to align himself with those who were 'making a great effort to liberate themselves, once and for all, from this conceptual framework.'[85]

Foucault distinguished between the 'proper name of the author' and the 'author-function' that that name might fulfil:

> The proper name and the name of an author oscillate between the poles of description and designation, and granting that they are linked to what they name, they are not totally determined either by their descriptive or designative functions. Yet – and it is here that the specific difficulties attending an author's name appear - the link between a proper name and the individual being named and the link between an author's name and that which it names are not isomorphous and do not function in the same way.[86]

Foucault noted that an author's name, a designator of a particular person, was at the same time a means of distinguishing a certain group of texts or works from others, implying 'that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentification, or of common utilization [are] established among them.' Thus the

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[83] Ibid., 302-3
[84] Ibid., 303
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 304

deployment of this name reflected 'the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within a society.'[87] Names were deployed in specific ways within particular discourses, including the history of art. The originating subject then, should not be restored on transcendental terms, according to Foucault, but nor should it be ignored. It should be recognized and reconsidered in order to 'seize its functions, its interventions in discourse, and its system of dependencies;'[88] in order to understand the discourse in which it circulates.

I draw on a variety of sources in this thesis, and it is necessary to distinguish between them in the light of these discussions. The sources can be organised into three different areas of discourse - critical discourse (writings on minimalism by the artists themselves, contemporaneous critics, and art historians who have formulated accounts of minimalism retrospectively); visual discourse (minimalist and 'neo-minimalist' works); and theoretical discourse (writings since the 1960s in philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and cultural theory). Following Foucault, I do not look to artists' writings for definitive interpretations of their work, but I do consider their critical activities to be of primary importance in understanding how the minimalist discourse has evolved. Minimalist artists have directed the content of this discourse to the extent that it has become consolidated around their written agendas. The issues they were reluctant to address – such as the ones that concern me here: reflections, optical illusions, spectacle – have been progressively excluded from critical histories of minimalism. At the same time, Judd's own philosophical discussions – his assertion of the delay at the point of creation, his belief in *a posteriori* ideas and his scepticism about 'progress' – make important contributions to the wider theoretical debate about what objects are and what art history might be, as I explore in the next chapter.

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[87] Ibid., 305
[88] Ibid., 314

Chapter 3

Systems of Order

If one rejected the Greenbergian teleological framing of art history in the 1960s, what alternative models were available to replace it? Replacing armatures of cause and effect, development and progress, with provisional groupings and mutating sequences might make it easier to maintain a sense of the works' singularities.

Against a closed system

In 1969, Judd denounced what he saw as critics' attempts 'to close the fairly open situation of contemporary art':

> There are lots of arguments for closure: a whole aesthetic or style, a half aesthetic or movement, a way of working, history or development, seniority, juniority, money and galleries, sociology, politics, nationalism. Usually little is said about particular works and artists and nothing about the actual differences and similarities between artists. [1]

Critics corralled heterogeneous artistic practices under a homogeneous heading of one kind or another, while ignoring the genuine commonalities that could, according to Judd, appear in the work of surprisingly different artists. Judging by his reviews, Judd saw his own interests – scale, wholeness, colour - being tackled by such varied artists as Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Lee Bontecou, John Chamberlain, Claes Oldenburg and Dan Flavin. None of the criteria listed above could accommodate the examination of one of these 'interests' across such a diverse group. Even though, as Judd implied, it was historically important to observe such commonalities, critical accounts that attempted to do so were rare:

> I've read very little about the present kind of large scale and it is common to almost everyone. It's very definite and will some day be an obvious aspect of

[1] Judd, 'Complaints: part I', 197

> the time. That's true of colour also, and of wholeness, which has been discussed some. Everything on the list should be considered but almost never should any argument result in the destructive conclusion that is the usual ending, or apparent ending, since it is often the premise.[2]

Judd complained that a fixed idea about an artist's work was more often than not an assumption conceived *before* the analysis - the apparent 'conclusion' was 'often [in fact] the premise'. He was particularly irritated by critics' attempts to identify the 'originators' of particular movements: he took issue with Leider's suggestion that Nauman and Serra were 'fathered by Morris', and resented Greenberg's suggestion that he and Morris had 'picked up on [Ann] Truitt's work.' He argued, 'It's impossible chronologically. Neither do good artists develop substantially from other artists' work.'[3] Judd seemed to be advocating a provisional and practical framework instead, that identified shared themes or forms, but allowed the works to remain complex in their singularity and open to inclusion in other clusters simultaneously. He implied that while there were interesting observations and comparisons to be made about how artists tackled particular themes or challenges, their works ought not to be reduced to any one of these.

In 1993, Judd made the observation that 'Art does not change in one line, not from A to B to C, but from V to 5 to L [...] Civilizations, like art, do not change in a line; it's best to avoid the word "progress".'[4] Although later in his career, in 1993, he seemed to want some acknowledgement as an early exponent, if not the originator, of 'installation', even then Judd did not claim to be the 'source' of an art historical genealogy. Rather, he argued that ideas which had materialised in his works had been extended and mutated (and indeed in his mind, degraded) by new artworks tackling the same terrain.

> One of the many destructive assumptions now is that all ideas have no originators; they are mutations in the public domain. [...] A new idea is quickly

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 199
[4] Donald Judd, 'Some Aspects of Colour in General and Red and Black in Particular' (1993) *Artforum*, vol 32, no 10, Summer 1994, repr. *Donald Judd*, exh. cat., (London: Tate, 2004) 146-7 and 148

> debased, often before the originator has time and money to continue it. In general I think this has happened to a lot of my work, but especially to the use of the whole room, which is now called installation, which basically I began.[5]

This jockeying for historical significance is not unusual. What interests me here is the way that Judd re-affirms his earlier notion that art history is more effectively visualised as open categories of 'ideas', which, when they are added to, 'mutate' rather than 'progress'. Judd's pragmatic acknowledgement of the 'delay' in understanding his own art, his recognition of the openness of the contemporary scene, and his discussion of a history of 'ideas' rather than 'movements' sits well with contemporary writing by cultural theorists like Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908) and George Kubler (1912-1996), who in the early 1960s, were examining and reinventing the 'shape' of history, finding new methodologies with which to approach anthropological and artistic artefacts, respectively.

Signs and relays

How should artworks be classified, if they are to avoid being consigned to a pre-determined art historical armature based on genre hierarchies and fixed media categories, yet at the same time maintain some kind of relationship with chronologically distant pieces? In his 1962 book *The Shape of Time*, Kubler attempted to find a new, more subtle framework for the historical categorization of artistic forms. Faced with a 'sea occupied by innumerable forms of a finite number of types,' and the 'nets' of style and biography being inadequate to the task, he sought to weave a 'net of another mesh [...] different from any now in use' in which to capture 'both the minute and main details of artistic activity.'[6] This net would not simply replace one overarching criteria of biography or style with another, however.

Kubler's conception of the 'sequence,' would act, rather, as a provisional, ever-changing framework, with which one could plot the 'gradually altered repetitions of the same

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[5] Ibid., 148-9

[6] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962) 32 -3

trait,'[7] or put another way, one might track the various 'solutions' to a particular artistic problem advanced at different times. 'The problem disclosed by any sequence of artifacts may be regarded as its mental form, and the linked solutions as its class of being.'[8] A key feature of the sequence was that it could accommodate the 'complexity of single things.' Once the 'difficulty' of single things is conceded, Kubler wrote, 'it is possible to find aspects that can be used in comparisons' - with the understanding that no trait is 'unitary or fundamental.'[9] Such classes were neither pre-determined, nor fixed, nor exclusive, then, but simply helped to group the observable pre-occupations of artists: the engagement with 'large scale' observed by Judd is an apt example. According to Kubler,

> The method imposed by such considerations is analytic and divisive rather than synthetic. It discards any idea of regular cyclical happening on the pattern of 'necessary' stylistic series [...] Sequence classing stresses the internal coherence of events, all while it shows the sporadic, unpredictable and irregular nature of their coherence.[10]

Importantly, with a class that is still open in t his way, every addition 'forces upon us a reassessment of all previous works.'[11] Kubler cited TS Eliot as perhaps the first to note, in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, the continuous mutation of traditions. Kubler also points to Andre Malraux's subsequent appropriation of the 'Eliot effect... where major artists are represented as altering their respective traditions retroactively by their own novel contributions.'[12] As we have seen, Judd, too, noticed that an 'idea' was altered retroactively with new contributions. Any extension of a sequence would effectively change the perception of the works within it. In the same year that Kubler's *Shape of Time* was published, 1962, Lévi-Strauss suggested that though images were fixed, their meanings were '*permutable*'. In his 1962 book, *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-

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[7] Ibid., 37
[8] Ibid., 33
[9] Ibid., 36
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 35
[12] Ibid.

Strauss held that images did not signify directly, but held a space open for signification; that is to say, images were not ideas in themselves, but they carved out a space for ideas:

> Images cannot be ideas but they can play the part of signs or, to be more precise, co-exist with ideas in signs and, if ideas are not yet present, they can keep their future place open for them and make its contours appear negatively. Images are fixed, linked in a single way to the mental act that accompanies them. Signs, and images which have acquired significance, may still lack comprehension... They are however, already *permutable*, that is, capable of standing in successive relations with other entities...[13]

The future perception of an object may be transformed in two ways: 'ideas' that were present in the object, which were not at first understood (which 'lack[ed] comprehension') may become legible later; and new 'entities' that come along later can generate new 'relations' for the object. Judd's definition of 'ideas' was more narrowly specific than the 'ideas' that Lévi-Strauss referred to here. Nevertheless, Judd's argument that ideas came as a result of the form, rather than as its motivation, did seem to open the way for new ideas to appear in the gaps in interpretation. The negative contours of something 'missed' might remain visible.

So what kind of art historical model could accommodate open signs and mutating sequences like these? Kubler suggested that 'the language of electrodynamics' might be more appropriate for the study of material culture than the 'language of botany' which still prevailed at the time he was writing. An event (or in the case of art, a particular artwork) emitted signals that were received by an audience, he suggested. These were 'inbuilt signals' with the kind of potential that Kubler compared to the kinetic potential of an object being prevented from falling. In their responses to an artwork, the writers and artists in the audience would interpret it: critics would analyse it in writing; artists would consider the 'problems' it addressed. The artwork would 'directly mov[e] other makers to repeat or to improve its solution.'[14] Writers and artists would thus emit yet

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[13] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20
[14] Kubler, *Shape of Time*, 21

further signals 'in an unbroken alternating sequence of event, signal, recreated event, renewed signal, etc.'[15] That is to say, writers and artists, as the receivers and senders of signals, acted as 'relays.'

I am particularly interested in the point that Kubler makes, that 'each relay is the occasion of some deformation in the original signal.' Each relay is based on an *interpretation* – the deformation arises as the signal is filtered through the particular perspective of the relayer.

> Certain details seem insignificant and they are dropped in the relay; others have an importance conferred by their relationship to events occurring at the moment of the relay, and so they are exaggerated. One relay may wish for reasons of temperament to stress the traditional aspects of the signal; another will emphasize their novelty. [16]

In other words, deformations in the relay could be caused by many things: inattention, misprision, polemical demands and individual agendas. Reflections and shadows in Judd's work were optically incidental - any failure to discuss them could be attributed to Helmholtz's theory of the 'quasi-utilitarian functioning of the mind in which sensory information that is unlikely to be useful or necessary is involuntarily unattended to.'[17] Of course, what is considered useful or necessary at a given time changes according to prevailing polemical priorities. These would affect the way signals were received - the way relative significance of its details were assessed – and then re-transmitted. Any blind spots in discourse would be perpetuated in future relays.

The intensity of particular polemical debates in the 1960s artworld would have undoubtedly narrowed the community's critical focus, with more urgent and contested issues taking precedence. In Judd's case, object art was put forward as an antidote to 'illusion', as I show in the next chapter. The art historical discourse that has since

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 21-2
[17] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 40

evolved around minimalism has taken its cues from the most prominent elements of those critical discussions, and has tended to leave certain, more 'marginal', observations unelaborated.

On the other hand, artists working in subsequent decades who have referenced minimalist forms have discovered and re-staged some of the complexities that they found lurking there. Kubler argued that 'the relay transmits a composite signal, composed only in part of the message as it was received, and in part of the impulses contributed by the relay itself.'[18] The fact that artists choose to relay a signal is, in itself, significant. Repetition or reference to an art historical precedent is a *gesture* that is visibly inscribed in the work and contributed to its meanings. Thus, one of the key 'impulses contributed by the relay itself' is likely to be the artist's own consideration of art history, and their negotiation of a place within it, as I explore in chapters 6 and 7.

Of particular use to me in constructing my own methodology, then, is Kubler's suggestion that blind spots are a constitutional part of art history. They are of specific interest in analysing that history. Not only are 'sequences' provisional, Kubler concluded, it may even be convenient to discard a sequential framework later on, 'after it has given access to previously invisible portions of the historical edifice.'[19] I will shortly being to construct a 'sequence' of works that tackle large scale and serial ordering - placing Judd's practice in a provisional grouping with Susan Hiller, Mona Hatoum, Tatham and O'Sullivan, and de Cock. I have two related, but distinct, motivations for assembling such a sequence: I want to access a 'previously invisible portion' of Judd's edifice (made up of things that have been dropped in written relays, but which have been taken up in certain artistic ones); and I want to consider the ways in which a present view of Judd's work might be productively informed by mutations in the 'sequence that have occurred since the 1960s.

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[18] Kubler, *Shape of Time*, 21-2
[19] Ibid., 36

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of these works in later chapters, I will explore the wider intellectual context for these critiques of closed systems. It is useful to see 1960s attempts to modify traditional art historical models as part of a wider discourse about systems (philosophical and scientific) and ordering (that is, arranging objects and relating them in discursive terms); both of which I consider here. These discourses also relate to specific perceived themes in the work of Judd and others. In order to address the themes of structure, series and system in the art of the 1960s, it is helpful to map out the intellectual and cultural terrain in which such readings were made.

Deconstructing systems

In 1969, Judd objected to the totalising effect of Greenberg's art historical system and his attempts to 'impose a universal style'. 'It's naïve and it's directly opposed to the nature of contemporary art, including that of the artists [he supports],'[20] Judd claimed. He approved Barbara Reise's 1968 critique of the philosophical allegiances that underpinned Greenberg's approach.[21]

> The philosophical form of Greenberg's historiography is quasi-dialectic progress in linear evolution; it is influenced by Marx, later dominated by Wölflinn, and thus tied to pre-Darwinian thought and to Hegel. [...] his historiographical vision plants Greenberg's art-historical form firmly in the nineteenth century. Since the content of his art history is twentieth century art, some interesting disparities between form and content occur; and in his later writings it is apparent that Greenberg's art history warps contemporary art to the shape of its own inflexible form.[22]

The assumption in Reise's argument is that art historical methodology should be in sympathy with the art it is attempting to categorise. She implies that contemporaneous philosophies are best placed to provide a 'form' for analysing the artistic 'content' of a particular era. Appropriately, Reise's argument - that the linear Hegelian form of

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[20] Judd, 'Complaints: part I', 197

[21] Ibid., 198. See also ch.2 n.50

[22] Barbara M Reise, 'Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View', *Studio International*, vol. 175, no. 901, May 1968, repr. Frascina, *Art in Modern Culture*, 256

Greenberg's history was outdated and inflexible - reflected an increasingly prevalent critique of Hegelian values in 1960s philosophy, anchored in a renewed appreciation of Nietzsche.

In the late nineteenth century Nietzsche (1844-1900) had berated philosophers like Hegel (1770-1831) on the grounds that they proposed metaphysical systems of morality and purpose, instead of facing the world as it really was – fragmented and contingent. Nietzsche complained that such a system, indeed *any* system, could offer only generalities, and that no system could take us beyond what was *already thought* in morality and politics. As one of his translators, R J Hollingdale, put it in 1961:

> Nietzsche never constructed a philosophical 'system': in his view no system could be true, but at best, a half-truth reflecting the psychological make-up of the man who framed it. Instead, he attacked the subject from every side, darting in now at this point, now at that; when he changed his mind he allowed the contradiction to stand since out of it truth might arise.[23]

Nietzsche's representation of Hegel's thought made no attempt to be sensitive to its complexities – he intended, rather, to establish a dichotomous relation between Hegel's view of history as essentially rational, and his own sense of the world as fragmented and contingent. The tension between these positions was a central concern of the new theories of deconstruction being developed in France by Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, which consolidated and developed the structural analysis of language and culture that had been undertaken in linguistics and anthropology in previous decades. A more detailed consideration of deconstructionist analysis is warranted partly because my own methodology draws on it in various ways; and partly because, as an intellectual development that is contemporaneous with minimalism in art, its motifs and concerns are a useful expression of certain pre-occupations and dilemmas afflicting people in the West.

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[23] RJ Hollingdale, Introduction to Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) 11

Deleuze's 1962 study of Nietzsche,[24] and Foucault and Derrida's regular references to his thought,[25] signalled a renewed interest in Nietzsche's radical embrace of discontinuity. Exploring and elaborating the ramifications of his scepticism, these philosophers did not propose a new system to replace Hegelianism so much as develop a series of meta-speculations about systems *per se*. Uncertainty was shown to be endemic in every system. Interestingly, my earlier discussions about the vagaries of attention (chapter 1), and the deferred origin of the art work (chapter 2), both find echoes in these early texts of post-structural thought. It is thus worth recapitulating some of their central propositions here.

In a roundtable discussion on the subject of Nietzsche, instigated by Deleuze at Royaumont in 1964, Foucault presented a paper that addressed the 'techniques of interpretation' in Nietzsche, Marx and Freud.[26] 'Language,' he suggested, (at least language in Indo-European countries),

> has always given rise to two kinds of suspicions. First of all, the suspicion that language does not exactly say what it means. [... Secondly] that in some way it overflows its properly verbal form, and that there are many other things in the world that speak, and that are not language.[27]

Each culture in Western civilization had had its ways of dealing with these suspicions, he argued, had had: 'its system of interpretation, its techniques, its methods.'[28] In the sixteenth century, for instance, a complex network of similitudes was instituted, based

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[24] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), Hugh Tomlinson, trans., *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)
[25] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' in *Nietzsche, Cahiérs du Royaumont* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1964), repr. Gayle L Ormiston and Alan D Schrift, eds., *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (1st ed., Éditions de Seuil, 1967) Alan Bass, trans., (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).
[26] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' 59
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 60

on resemblance.[29] During the evolution of Western thought in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resemblance had been 'put in parenthesis,' and subjected to the critiques of Bacon and Descartes. In the late nineteenth century, texts such as Marx's *Capital vol. 1* (1867), Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) had 'founded anew the possibility of a hermeneutic.'[30] In place of 'resemblance', Foucault argued, these texts introduced a system of 'interpretation'. However, interpretation put us in 'an uncomfortable position,'[31] for two reasons.

Firstly, meaning was rendered mutable and unstable. Foucault argued that a 'circular' hermeneutic system existed in opposition to the linearity of a Hegelian dialectic on the one hand, and to the relative stability of the signifier/signified pairing in semiotics on the other.[32]

> The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primarily, originally, actually, like coherent, pertinent and systematic marks. // The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there is nothing but interpretations.[33]

In the hermeneutics initiated by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, interpretation 'became an endless task': 'From the nineteenth century on, signs were linked in an inexhaustible, as

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[29] "In fact, this corpus of resemblance in the sixteenth century was perfectly organized. There were at least five exactly defined notions: - The notion of convenience [*convenance*, propriety, expediency, fitness], *convenentia*, which is agreement (for example, of the soul to the body, or the animal series to the vegetable series. – The notion of *sympatheïa*, sympathy, which is the identity of accidents in direct substances. – The notion of *emulation*, which is the very curios parallelism of attributes in substances or in distinct beings, such that the attributes of being are like the reflection of the other's attributes (Thus Porta explains that the human face, with the seven parts that distinguish it, is the emulation of the sky with its seven planets.) – The notion of *signatura*, the signature, which is the image of an invisible and hidden property among the visible properties of an individual. – And then, of course, the notion of *analogie*, which is the identity of the relation between two or more distinct substances." Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' 60

[30] Ibid., 61

[31] Ibid.

[32] 'In opposition to the age of signs, which is a time when payments fall due, and in opposition to the age of the dialectic, which despite everything is linear, one has an age of interpretation which is circular. This age is obliged to pass again where it has already passed.' Ibid., 66

[33] Ibid., 66-7

well as infinite network, not because they rested on a resemblance without border, but because there were irreducible gaps and openings.'[34]

Secondly, because it was impossible to map an interpretation directly onto the thing presented for interpretation, an act of interpretation entailed an interpretation of itself. The 'who' doing the interpreting was brought into the equation. Thus, the 'age of interpretation' both instituted, and analysed, the 'interpreter' – creating a split between the self as agent, and the self as subject. Increasingly, humans were the subject of the interpretation, in these seminal texts, and in other 'human sciences' initiated at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Foucault addressed the development of philology, biology and political economy in his 1966 book *The Order of Things*.) A hall of mirrors had emerged:

> Since we interpret, we interpret ourselves according to these techniques. It is with these techniques of interpretation, in return that we must question these interpreters who were Freud, Nietzsche and Marx, so that we are always returned in a perpetual play of mirrors.[35]

I consider the importance of the 'return' in more detail in chapter 5.

The endless deferral and increased self-consciousness brought into being by the system of interpretation provoked what Foucault called a 'wound' in Western thought. Arguably, the 'shock effect' of these important texts was to acquaint readers with their desire for self-presence, ensuring, ironically, that it was delayed indefinitely, just as the motif of the mirror illustrated:

> I wonder whether we could not say that by involving us in an interpretative task that always reflects upon itself, Freud, Nietzsche and Marx did not constitute around us, and for us, those mirrors which reflect to us the images whose inexhaustible wounds form our contemporary narcissism.[36]

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[34] Ibid., 63
[35] Ibid., 61
[36] Ibid., 62

If we take such wounds to be comparable to those inflicted in Lacan's mirror-stage, we surmise that the contemporary obsession with the self was fuelled by the impossibility of unifying one's sensation of self, and one's frozen, ideal mirror-image. The strange dislocation of Monet's and Stieglitz's shadow portraits comes to mind here.[37] A shadowy ghost appears were a pristine reflected double might be expected.

Foucault argued that Nietzsche, Marx and Freud had modified the 'distributive space in which signs can be signs.'[38] He pictured the implications of this two years later, in his 1966 book, *The Order of Things*. In his preface he quoted a passage from Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) which described the contents of:

> "a certain Chinese encyclopedia" in which it is written that, "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."[39]

The list was more disturbing even than Roussel's extreme juxtaposition of the umbrella and sewing machine on an operating table. It destroyed 'the common ground upon which [even] such meetings [were] possible.'[40] 'Though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space,' Foucault observed.[41] The thing that had been removed for Foucault, was the table or grid where these things might be organised and named: the 'tabula'

> that enables thought to operate upon the entities of the world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and differences – the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.'[42]

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[37] See chapter 2
[38] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' 61
[39] Jorge Luis Borges, quoted by Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (London: Routledge, 1970), xv
[40] Ibid., xvi
[41] Ibid., xvii
[42] Ibid.

This insight was at once liberating and discomfiting. On the one hand, the passage from Borges had 'kept [him] laughing a long time'; on the other, this playful motif inspired a certain uneasiness. There arose, Foucault said,

> a suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry [...][43]

In the same year, 1966, Derrida described what he saw as two opposed responses to this kind of disorder, that is to say, 'a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences, [which...] extends the domain and play of signification indefinitely.'[44] One response regretted the loss, the other celebrated it:

> Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, [the] structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is [...] the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.[45]

Of these 'two interpretations of interpretation,' the former, structuralist approach still sought 'to decipher' and to establish a 'new humanism', while the latter tried to embrace uncertainty, and 'pass beyond man and humanism.'[46] Derrida argued that although these

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play,' (a lecture delivered in October, 1966 at the International Colloquium on Critical Languages and Sciences of Man, The John Hopkins University, Baltimore,) repr. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 354
[45] Ibid., 369
[46] Ibid., 370

two attitudes were 'absolutely irreconcilable [...] we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy.'[47]

Embracing uncertainty was most difficult, and yet most urgent, when order was jeopardised. Even Foucault was seemingly perplexed by the prospect of disorder without law or geometry. So what role did the Chinese list serve in Foucault's thinking about order? In an interesting echo of Kubler's provisional sequence classifications, Foucault suggested that ordering was 'not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analysing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents.'[48] Crucially though, establishing a 'considered classification' – one that was coherent in cultural terms – was always the result of 'the application of preliminary criteria.'[49] 'Order', then, referred to both the 'inner law' of objects, and to the categorical organisation that language and culture legislated in advance:

> Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.[50]

So, a culture ordered itself along habitual grid lines, instituted by language, just as, to refer to an earlier part of my analysis, one's attention was liable to make selections according to habit and 'constancies'. But, as we saw in chapter 1, a re-orientation of attention could reveal hitherto unnoticed, and often bewildering, details. Similarly, according to Foucault, the intimation of a latent order, 'waiting in silence [in the gaps of an expressed order] for its moment of expression,' affirmed that the manifest order was in fact provisional, and the 'concrete contents' of objects might in fact be encountered and classified differently. An order, he implied, was stalked by other, invisible orders.

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xix
[49] Ibid., xx
[50] Ibid.

According to Merleau-Ponty, as we saw in chapter 1, the visible 'element' of the flesh of the world adhered to the here and now, but it also inaugurated the possibility of different times and places.[51]

Thus, in Foucault's estimation, the shocking removal of the tabula was potentially revelatory. The absurdity of the list drew attention to an obscure domain that existed between the fundamental codes of culture on the one hand ('those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices,')[52] and, on the other, the scientific theories and philosophical interpretations which explain how and why order exists ('what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and this particular order has been established and not some other.')[53]

> Between these two regions, so distant from one another, lies a domain which, even though its role is mainly an intermediary one, is nonetheless fundamental: it is more confused, more obscure and probably less easy to analyse. It is here that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, and instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or best ones; this culture finds itself faced with the stark fact that [...] order *exists*.[54]

In other words, between the ordering codes and reflections upon order, there is 'the pure experience of order and its modes of being.'[55] By deviating from a culture's hidden ordering codes, Foucault suggested, a satirical instance of order like the Chinese Encyclopedia might shine a light upon them, and expose them as contingent. Through

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[51] See above, 25
[52] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., xxi

the process of superimposing 'another kind of grid' upon the usual 'linguistic, perceptual and practical grids', a culture would come 'face to face with order in its primary state.'[56]

Derrida had suggested a similar process in 1963. 'Structure [...] can be *methodically* threatened,' he thought, 'in order to be comprehended more clearly and to reveal not only its supports but also that secret place in which it is neither construction nor ruin but lability.'[57] For Derrida, a structure would most clearly reveal its order, and the secret instability of that order, when 'content' was less prominent:

> The relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized. Somewhat like the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art. A city no longer inhabited, not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture.[58]

Derrida could have been describing any number of minimalist works in this picture of reduced figurative content, skeletal forms, and a palpable sense of absence; I assess the value of such an analogy shortly. At the same time, he re-asserted the idea that a reduced image of 'order' or 'structure' was liable to be haunted by the meaning it excluded.

What Foucault and Derrida referred to as 'grids' of order were primarily discursive frames – they were rooted in language. The 'obscure domain' where order might be perceived *as such*, was located in the gaps in the grid. This was the domain where language failed in some way: Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia had posited an absurdity; Derrida's city structure had been abandoned by 'meaning and culture.' One might say that the first represented an overload in the system of signification, the second a blockage. Might such actions be consolidated as a 'strategy' for revealing the form of

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[56] Ibid., xx-xxi
[57] Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', *Critique*, nos 193-94, June-July 1963, repr., Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 4-5 (original emphasis)
[58] Ibid., 4

order? If so, works of visual art would be particularly well placed to pursue such a strategy.

Works of visual art are concrete; an image is always a fact. For example, consider the myriad types of creatures in Borges' list. While they are imaginary, their particular characteristics can remain blurred in the mind, but depicting one necessitates a number of decisive choices about its appearance.[59] Its status in language, as a generic type, is suspended, and as an image it becomes *one instance* of, for example, a creature 'drawn with a very fine camelhair brush.'[60] As Lévi-Strauss argued, 'Images cannot be ideas but they can play the part of signs or, to be more precise, co-exist with ideas in signs.'[61] In other words, images are *figures* first. Though they may come to play a part in discourse, and host ideas expressed in language, there is something concrete about them that is *irreducible* to discourse or language. As this quality asserts itself, then the object's function as a sign is obscured. Ironically, this allows myriad other signs to attach themselves, or at least present themselves, all at once. We experience both a block and an overload. Bearing this in mind, I now turn to a discussion of structure, systems and seriality in the very different practices of Judd and LeWitt, and in the art commentary of the mid 1960s.

Order in art

In a radio interview that Bruce Glaser conducted with Judd and Frank Stella in 1964, (later reprinted in Gregory Battcock's 1968 anthology, *Minimal Art*) both artists talked about their desire to get away from what they called 'relational' values in art. They wanted to distance themselves from the legacy of early European abstraction; Vasarely was a recent exponent whose continuing interest in composition and balance they regarded as outdated. Judd, particularly, felt that all that art was

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[59] I am indebted to Louise Milne for this insight.
[60] Jorge Luis Borges, quoted by Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv
[61] Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 20. See above, 77

> based on systems built beforehand, *a priori* systems; they express a certain type of thinking and logic that is pretty much discredited now [by 'philosophers and scientists'] as a way of finding out what the world is like.[62]

'Earlier painting was saying that there's more order in the scheme of things than we admit now,' Judd went on: 'Poussin's order is anthropomorphic. Now there are no preconceived notions.'[63] The same anti-Hegelian sentiment that galvanised contemporary French philosophy at this time also underpinned Judd's argument, (think of his scepticism about causality in art history, related earlier).[64] Judd's own philosophical sympathies were empiricist,[65] but common ground with post-structuralism is nevertheless evident here. Considered from this distance in time, the precise polemic nuances in Judd's argument are somewhat obscure, but I take it that he regarded an artistic 'relating' of parts as an attempt to fit them back into already existing systems of meaning – to incorporate them into a language, if you like.

In order to stall the relating of parts to each other and avoid pandering to a retrograde desire for familiar overarching systems, Stella chose symmetry while Judd aimed for a '"whole" effect.'[66] When Glaser suggested that their methods were still 'rationalistic' in the sense that the work was planned in advance and often executed to a preconceived programme, Judd insisted that this was a 'much smaller' kind of pre-conception. It was based on more provisional, and indeed, more personal, criteria. Instead of resisting order by picturing chaos and chance (as Pollock had done), Judd felt it was 'better to make that a foregone conclusion [and] use a form that doesn't look like order or disorder.'[67] His simple serial forms were chosen as a bulwark against rationalist order, then, rather than an expression of it.

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[62] Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', *Art News*, vol. 65, no. 5, September 1966, repr. Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995) 151
[63] Glaser, 'Questions', 156
[64] See above, 74
[65] See Raskin, 'Judd's Moral Art', for a thorough and insightful assessment of Judd's self-confessed debt to the ideas of Ralph Barton Perry.
[66] Glaser, 'Questions', 154
[67] Ibid., 156

> Take a simple form – say a box – and it does have an order, but it's not so ordered that that's the dominant quality. The more parts a thing has, the more important order becomes, and finally order becomes more important than anything else.[68]

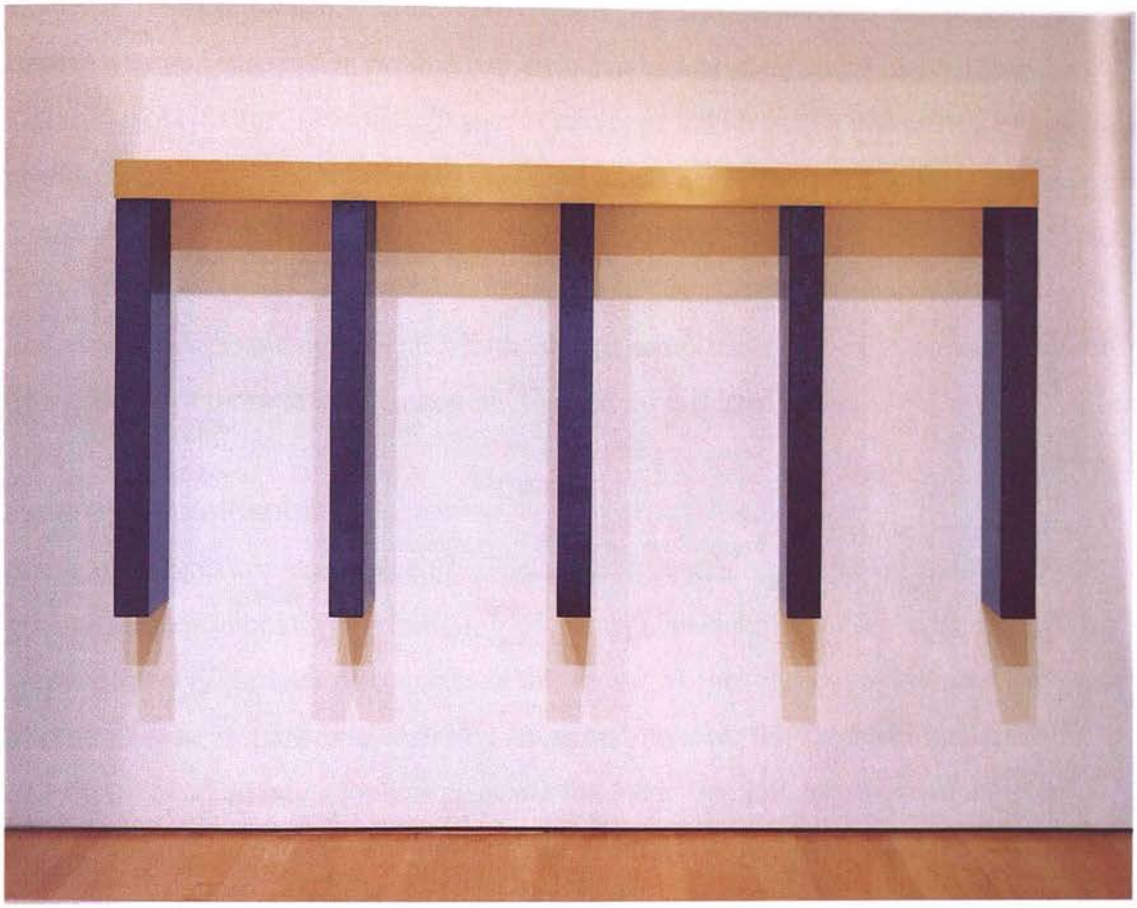

Fig. 3.1 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1964, brass and blue lacquer on galvanised iron, 40.5" x 84" x 6.75" (103 x 213.4 x 17.2 cm), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Speaking about an early piece from 1964 that had a serial element (fig. 3.1), Judd explained,

> To me the piece with the brass and five verticals is above all *that shape*. I don't think of the brass being opposed to the five things, as Gabo or Pevsner might

[68] Ibid.

> have an angle and then another one supporting it or relating on a diagonal. Also, the verticals below the brass both support the brass and pend from it, and the length is just enough so it seems that they hang, as well as support it, so they're caught there. I didn't think it came loose as independent parts. If they were longer and the brass obviously sat on them, then I wouldn't like it.[69]

Judd alludes here to what I consider to be a defining aspect of his practice. The elements in this piece are 'caught' between hanging and supporting. Judd achieves a kind of charged suspension between opposites, which arrests, rather than encourages, dialectical oscillation. It is the *alliance* of two opposed ideas that produces a compelling object. Here, Judd was referring to the shape of the work, but in his writing, this conceit recurs time and again, in relation to various elements of practice. To my mind, it is there in the opposition that I explore later, between specific objects and the constantly mutating reflections they generate; both object and optical effect exist, and one cannot be said to exist more than the other, but they are of different orders.

Polarity and alliance

Going over Judd's writings recently, Richard Shiff usefully unravelled Judd's various pronouncements about 'polarization.'[70] A closer consideration of this concept will prepare the way for later discussions in this thesis. A line of thought initiated early on in his enthusiastic responses to works by Johns and Pollock, this interest in polarization eventually evolved into a kind of principle for Judd. In 1960, he observed that, 'A curious polarity and alliance of the materiality of objects and [the] qualities of paint and colour are implicit in each of Johns' paintings.'[71] Judd was particularly impressed with *False Start* (fig. 3.2) which featured 'stenciled names of various colours, seldom in their own,'[72] (i.e., their own colours). The colours and the words were 'exchangeable in space, and so maintain[ed] the explicit thin depth with considerable variation.'[73] Did this 'depth' refer to the depth between two unalike things, as well as optical depth?

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[69] Ibid., 155-6
[70] See Richard Shiff, 'Donald Judd: Safe From Birds,' in Serota, ed., *Donald Judd,* particularly 48-58
[71] Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries: Jasper Johns,' *Arts Magazine*, March 1960, repr. Judd, *Complete Writings* (1975), 14
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

Shiff suggested that, for Judd, 'material objects and sensory qualities' were 'different entities.'[74]

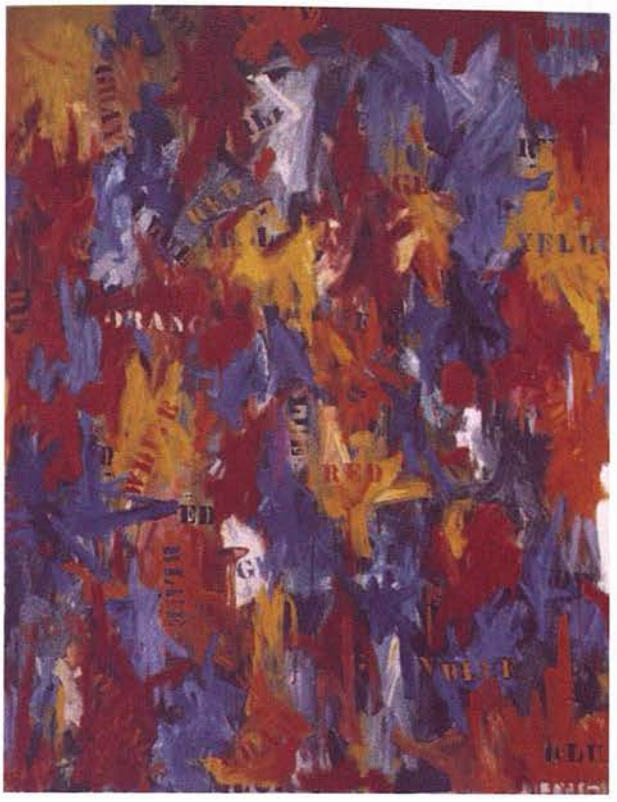

Fig 3.2 Jasper Johns, False Start, 1959, oil on canvas, 67.25" x 54" (170.8 x 137.2 cm), Private Collection Lauros/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library

In the same year, 1960, Judd commented that Pollock

> … achieves generality by establishing an extreme polarity between the simple, immediate perception of paint and canvas […] and the complexity and overtones of his imagery and articulated structure. Such diverse elements combined under tension produce a totality much greater and unlike any of the parts.'[75]

Here again, Judd appeared to make a distinction between form and effect, and to appreciate the power of bringing simplicity and complexity into tension. Shiff summed

[74] Shiff 'Safe From Birds', 30
[75] Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries: Helen Frankenthaler,' *Arts Magazine*, March 1960, repr. Judd, *Complete Writings* (1975), 13

up the development of Judd's thinking about 'polarity in alliance' with a range of quotes spanning the late 1960s to the early 1980s:

> 'Most paintings by other artists', Judd argued, 'seem harmonious in comparison [to Pollock]', having a 'moderated a priori generality', a lot of like things gathered together. Hence his conclusion: 'The level of quality of a work can usually be established by the extent of the polarity between its generality [the whole composition] and its particularity [in Pollock's case, the material marks].' Reaching still further, Judd stated: 'The greater the polarity of the elements in a work, the greater the work's comprehension of space, time and existence.'[76]

In other words, in orchestrating and arranging unalike elements, fusing them into a perspicuous object, a work might span a philosophical expanse – it might 'comprehend' space, time and existence.

So how legible was this strategy for viewers of Judd's own work? As I show in the next chapter, the revelatory power of contradiction was an implicit feature of many critical negotiations of Judd's reflections. For an explicit articulation of Judd's polarization though, we can go to Smithson. In 1965, Judd asked Smithson to write a catalogue essay regarding his contribution to the *7 Sculptors* exhibition at Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art. Although one assumes that Judd briefed Smithson to a degree, Smithson's own preoccupations and perspectives are also evident in the account. He compared Judd's 'pink plexiglas box' (fig. 3.3) to a crystal – 'a solid bounded by symmetrically grouped surfaces, which have definite relationships to a set of imaginary lines called axes.'[77] Smithson likened the five tension wires, strung between the steel ends of the box, to crystalline axes, but found that box, revealingly, differed from a natural crystal in terms of its inner tensions. 'The entire box would collapse without the tension of the axes. The five axes are polarized between two stainless steel sides.' Were

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[76] Shiff, 'Safe From Birds', 51, with quotes from Judd, 'Jackson Pollock', *Arts Magazine*, April 1967, repr., Judd, *Complete Writings* (1975), 195; 'Art and Architecture' a lecture for Yale University School of Art, 1983, and 'Abstract Expressionism' repr., *Donald Judd Complete Writings 1975 -1986*, (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1987) 34, 45.

[77] Robert Smithson, 'Donald Judd' (1965), repr. Flam, *Collected Writings*, 6

the wires holding up the ends, or the ends holding up the wires? Again, the work presented two (or more) ways of conceiving the facts. This conundrum was, itself, enclosed *and* revealed by the Plexiglas.

> The inside surfaces of the steel sides are visible through the transparent plexiglass. Every surface is within full view, which makes the inside and outside equally important. Like many of Judd's works, the separate parts of the box are held together by tension and balance, both of which add to its static existence.[78]

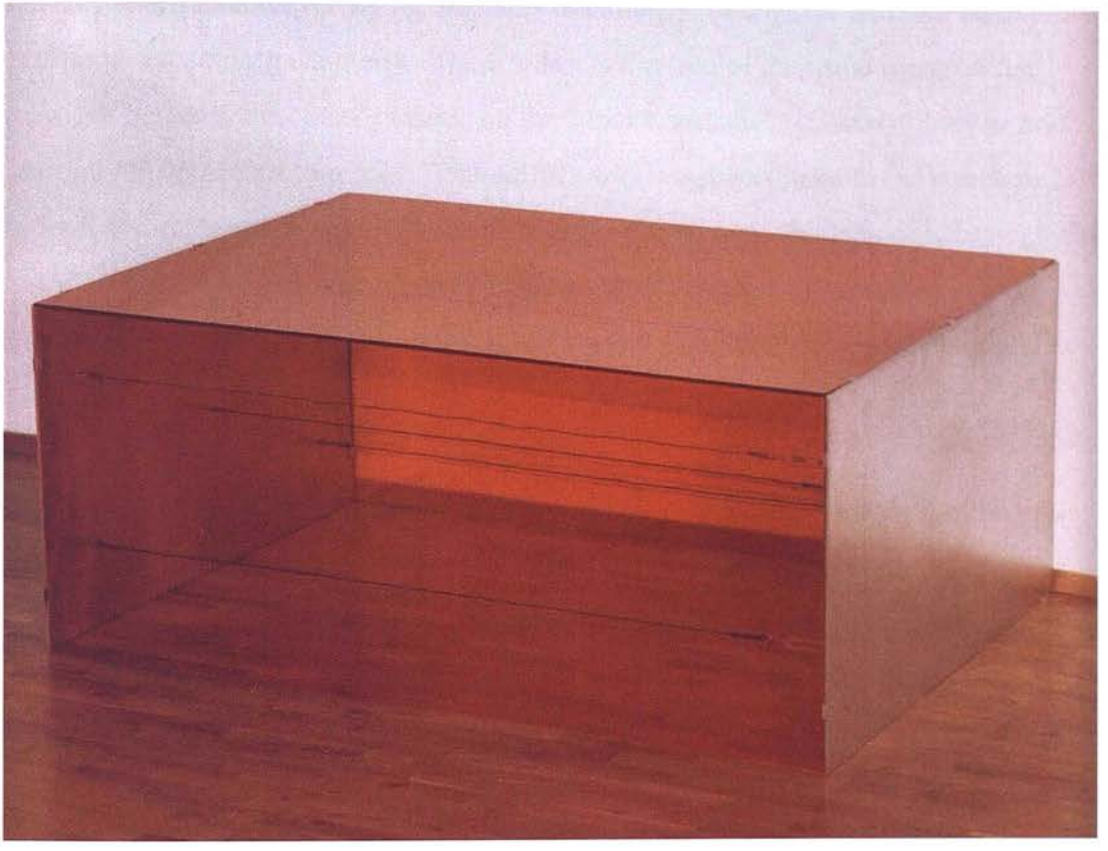

Fig. 3.3 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1966, amber Plexiglas and stainless steel, 20" x 48" x 34" (50.8 x 122 x 86.4 cm), Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart; Photo, Bert Burgemeister Pfullingen

[78] Ibid.

Smithson went on to describe the intellectual effect of such confident equivocation, in relation to the same brass piece Judd had commented on in his radio interview (fig 3.1). As well as the tension between hanging and supporting that Judd had identified, Smithson proposed a further polarity - between surface and structure:

> It is impossible to tell what is hanging from what or what is supporting what. Ups are downs and downs are ups. An uncanny materiality inherent in the surface engulfs the basic structure. Both surface and structure exist simultaneously in a suspended condition. [79]

Surface was characterised by its 'uncanny materiality' (a concept that will be explored further in the coming chapters). There was a disruption of the usual hierarchical relations between the 'facts', visible on the surface, and the 'substance' they would normally be expected to reveal. This surface was not subordinate to the structure; indeed, it threatened to engulf it. Instead, there was an apparent lack of substance at the 'core'. 'The important phenomenon is always the basic lack of substance at the core of the 'facts.' The more one tries to grasp the surface structure, the more baffling it becomes,'[80] Smithson wrote.

It is worth returning for a moment to Foucault's motifs, to help explain Smithson's point. Recalling Nietzsche's critique of 'ideal depth' – 'the pure interior search for truth,' which he argued was merely an invention of philosophers – Foucault argued that a circular hermeneutic system chipped away at the topological characterisation of interpretation as mining depth. In fact, he argued, 'When one interprets, one can in reality traverse this descending line only to restore the sparkling exteriority that has been covered up and buried.' Depth might be 'restored' but at the same time, it was revealed 'as an absolutely superficial secret,' 'a game, and crease [*pli*] in the surface.'[81] Introducing a disjunction between surface and structure revealed the supposed 'depth' between them to be superficial, perhaps like the 'explicit thin depth' between words and

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' 62

their materiality that Judd described in Johns' *False Start*. Smithson suggested that it was difficult to maintain the idea of Judd's box, or his wall piece, as a single entity with its surface exposed and structure buried. Rather, surface and structure were revealed to be two separate entities, converging. They could be held apart in the mind (polarised), but also, crucially, they were perceived together (in alliance). One didn't need to make a choice about which one to focus on.

As Foucault argued, rational order was established when surface and structure coincided. It was located at the point where they met. Judd's objects, in separating surface and structure, posited an order at the same time as presenting its dissolution. This ambivalence towards order was evident in many negotiations of the system in the 1960s (I will look at LeWitt's work in this light shortly). It is worth situating Judd's and LeWitt's work in relation to these wider discussions.

American systems in 1960s

For Americans in the 1960s, a system was a concrete concept, as well as a philosophical one. It related not only to an overarching worldview or ordering principle, but also to the 'orderly processes at work in a complex array of multiple, interacting variables, be it a living organism, an environmental milieu, or a computing machine.'[82] New ways of thinking about the 'system' had arisen from the scientific and technical 'advances' in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Brick, the world was increasingly understood as a *variety* of systems, operating and interlinking at different levels. By the 1960s, the related bureaucratic, industrial, and military 'complexes' in America had become powerfully influential. There was a great deal of cultural investment in, and perhaps unsurprisingly, anxiety about, what systems meant for American culture.

The ubiquity of 'the system' (applied with increasing frequency to specific structures in the fields of biology, technology, sociology, anthropology and others) was reflected in the emergence of General Systems Theory. A theory initiated by biologists and

[82] Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 124

mathematicians Ludwig von Bertalanffy and Norbert Wiener, General Systems Theory posited significant parallels between machine processes and biological organisms, in particular in their 'analogous attempts to control entropy through feedback' as Wiener put it.[83] General Systems Theory proved influential, soon extending beyond its initially technical parameters:

> By the 1960s, references to systems, systems analysis, and control appeared promiscuously throughout elite culture. "To information-processing specialists, corporate managers, engineers, and military experts," the critic Robert Boguslaw tartly observed in 1965, "using the word system is to be *au courant* about the latest in technical fashion and good taste."'[84]

What interests me is the ambivalence within the attitudes and applications of General Systems Theory. Its origins were in the 'militaristic and technocratic sciences,' and yet, paradoxically, it also provided the ground for the new fields of 'conflict resolution,' and 'ecology and environmental politics,' (the concept of the 'ecosystem' insisted on the 'interrelatedness of natural milieus.')[85] The very notion of a general theory of systems indicated a search for an underlying unity that might, through its criterion of isomorphism, act as a framework for locating the meaning of things, while the conception of the feedback loop testified to the presence within the system of a certain openness and contingency, which reflected the continuous transformation of things and their relations. As Brick put it,

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[83] Norbert Wiener, *The Human Uses of Human* Beings, (New York, Avon Books: 154,1967), p. 38, cited by Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 126. Brick explains: 'For decades, biologists had described the systematic character of organismic processes – responses to stimuli that restored and maintained an internal equilibrium – particularly since French physiologist Claude Bernard's 1878 study of the body's "internal milieu" and the continuing work on "homeostasis" by Harvard scientists Walter B Cannon and LJ Henderson I the 1920s and 1930s. Wiener knew their work, and when during World War II he began applying the notion of homeostatic controls to the problem of designing self-correcting machine processes (specifically, automatic means of aiming artillery based on radar information about moving targets), he settled on the keystone of his new science: the phenomenon of "feedback loops," in which information about the consequences of a certain operation toward a desired effect. In his projected "cybernetic" studies of information, communication, purpose and the control of action, Wiener saw a general science capable of addressing patterns of human life, the design of computing machines, and problems that arose in the interaction between the two. For Wiener, life and mechanism came together to create order in a physical world that otherwise diffused energy (or increased entropy).' Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 126-7

> To some of their proponents, [systems theories] provided a basis for the unity of all sciences, an old positivist dream; to others, they suggested a holistic method of interpretation challenging the reductive and analytical traditions of scientific method. To some advocates, the understanding of complexity promised by systems theory and cybernetics opened prospects for social reform; to critics, they suggested only the refinement of coercive constraints. [86]

Similarly, counter-cultural references to systems were fraught with paradox. 'The system' was the name coined to describe the reigning political order and its mechanisms of social control by those that sought to resist its purported operations. Though the actions of the system were criticized by its opponents, the concept was nevertheless useful to them. It enabled them to draw '"connections" among diverse social problems; it indicated that the flaws in society were fundamental, endemic – not incidental.'[87] Paul Potter, the president of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) described the sinister activities of a state engaged in war in Vietnam and racist policies in the American South, as systemic: 'We must name that system. We must name it, analyze it, understand it and change it.'[88] On the other hand, Brick explained, the idea of describing human interaction in systemic terms was, in itself, sinister. 'Besides rooting diverse evils in a flawed fundamental structure [...] the new radicals also criticized American society for *being* systematized, running under a regime so effective in controlling affairs that a rigid stability was ensured.[89] Daniel Bell recognized that 'the idea of "Control"' lay at the heart of systemization.[90] Where once, 'social control' might have been desirable as the means of mitigating the worst effects of capitalism, Brick observed:

> Now [...] many critics generally spurned "social control" as a vision of coercive restraint and discipline, as the manipulative management of human behavior,

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[86] Ibid., 124
[87] Ibid., 124-5
[88] Ibid., 132
[89] Ibid.
[90] Daniel Bell, from 1965, cited by Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 124 (no ref)

> intended to ensure order for its own sake and power for the few. This mutation in the meaning of "control" had begun with the discovery of totalitarianism in the late 1930s and Max Weber's critique of bureaucratized society that became familiar in American life after the war.[91]

While student activists like Potter sought to expose the system, others of his generation attempted to circumvent it, celebrating instead the chaotic 'disorderliness' of reality: 'A special solicitude for the undisciplined impulse, for giving free rein to a wild spirit, liberating play from the spirit of work, emerged as a Dionysian element of the time, helping to forge a counter-cultural sensibility.'[92] The industrial-military complex was a less prominent issue in Europe, which did not enjoy the same post-war prosperity and ambition as Americans, but resisting the instrumentalisation of the individual was nevertheless a key motivation for the Situationists too, with their slogan *Ne travaillez jamais,* ('Never Work') and their intentionally 'purposeless' navigations of the city.[93]

Even *within* broadly affirmative and resistant positions, then, there was ambivalence about exactly how to regard manifestations of a system. A desire for intellectual order and clarity competed with an aspiration to be free of social convention or cultural dictate - that is, free of the rigidities of an imposed or inherited order. In artistic circles too, where the 'system' became a thematic motif in the mid 1960s, it was understood by commentators that 'systemic' modes served to emphasize the *concrete* and *conceptual* aspects of the work, thereby undermining older art historical systems of interpretation.

Series, system and structure in art

Laurence Alloway (1926-1990), in the exhibition catalogue for his group show *Systemic Painting* at the Guggenheim, observed that the use of systems in recent art was *pointed* –

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[91] Ibid., 132

[92] "A special solicitude for the undisciplined impulse, for giving free rein to a wild spirit, liberating play from the spirit of work, emerged as a Dionysian element of the time, helping to forge a counter-cultural sensibility." Ibid., 125

[93] Situationist International operated, in various guises, from 1957-1972. See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, (Cambridge, Mass and London, England: MIT Press, 1998), and also below, 181-3

it was intended to be noticed by the viewer. 'This organization does not function as the invisible servicing of the work of art, but is the visible skin. It is not, that is to say, an underlying composition, but a factual display.'[94] Such a display tended to draw attention to the conceptual underpinning of the work. At the same time, by avoiding referential or expressive content, such structures also asserted their materiality - the system and its material manifestation was all there was to see.

Mel Bochner (b. 1940) was involved as artist and curator in two group shows that focussed on this theme.[95] In his 1967 article 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism,' he identified the common effect of 'heightened artificiality' in systemic work, which arose 'because of the clearly visible and simply ordered structure it uses.'[96] Bochner, like Alloway, held that the simple order of permutation or series emphasised the 'object of art in terms of its own material individuality.'[97] Serial art was in that sense *figural*; it was well placed to stall the kind of interpretation that threatened to usurp the specificity of artworks with linguistic explanation.[98] In 'Against Interpretation', published in 1964, Susan Sontag (1933-2004) had argued that:

> Today [...] the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling [...] It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world - in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings'... The world, our world, is depleted enough. Away with duplicates of it, until we experience again more immediately what we have.[99]

Was Sontag suggesting that the materiality of art might in some way draw a halt to the endless circulation of interpretation (and heal the 'wound') which, according to

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[94] Laurence Alloway, 'Systemic Painting' 1966, repr., Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 58

[95] Bochner curated *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* in December 1966 at the School of Visual Arts, and was involved in the conception of Elayne Varian's *Art in Series* exhibition in 1967 at Finch College Museum of Art (which followed *Art in Process: The Visual Development of a Structure*, shown the previous year).

[96] Mel Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', 1967, *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1967, repr., Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 93

[97] Ibid.

[98] See above, 90

[99] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 1st edn, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966, (London: Vintage, 2001), 7

Foucault, had been inflicted by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud?[100] 'Ideally,' she continued, 'it is possible to elude the interpreters [...] by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be... just what it is.'[101] Sontag's comments echo those, already discussed, by Foucault, in which he suggests that interpretative depth is exposed as an illusion when the only thing revealed is a work's 'sparkling exteriority.'[102]

Sontag may have been thinking primarily about film, but she described both a problem and a solution that Bochner would have recognised in relation to objects. For him,

> the entire being of an art object, is in its appearance. [...] Whatever art is, it is, and criticism, which is language, is something different. Language comes to terms with art by creating parallel structures or transposing, both of which are less than adequate. [...] What has been generally neglected is a concern with the object of art in terms of its own material individuality – the thing itself.[103]

Bochner argued that the new serial work required new models of critical engagement. Rather than 'impressionistic', 'historical' or 'metaphorical' criticism, [104] Bochner felt that a new 'concrete' and 'simplificatory' approach should be adopted.

> First, the considerations should be concrete (deal with the facts of the thing itself). Second, they should be simplificatory (provide an intellectually economic structure for the group of facts obtained). The latter is necessary because description alone can never adequately locate things. [105]

A critic, in other words, ought to observe the elements of material presentation, and seek to 'locate' them in relation to some kind of conceptual/philosophical proposition.

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[100] See above, 82-84
[101] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 11
[102] See above, 97
[103] Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', 93
[104] 'Criticism has traditionally consisted of one of three approaches: 'impressionistic' criticism, which has concerned itself with the effects of the work of art on the observer – individual responses; 'historical' criticism, which has dealt with an *a posteriori* evolution of forms and techniques – what is between works; and 'metaphorical' criticism, which has contrived numerous analogies – most recently to scientism.' Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

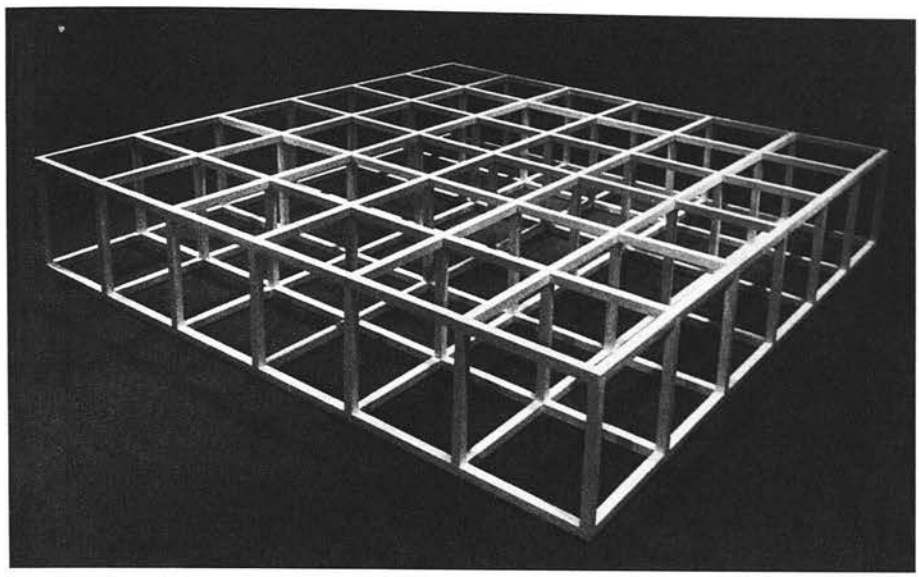
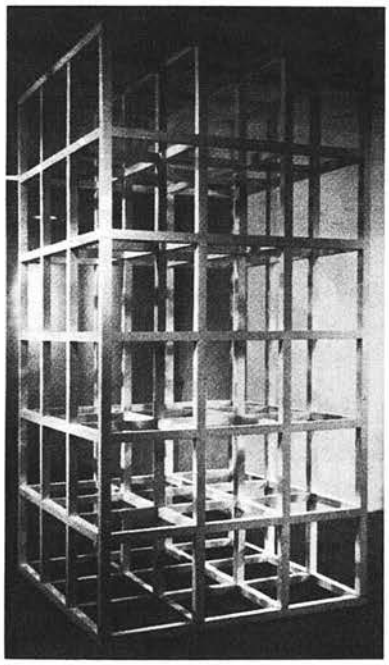


Fig. 3.4 Sol LeWitt, *Modular Floor Structure*, 1966, painted wood, 25.25 x 141.5 x 141.5"



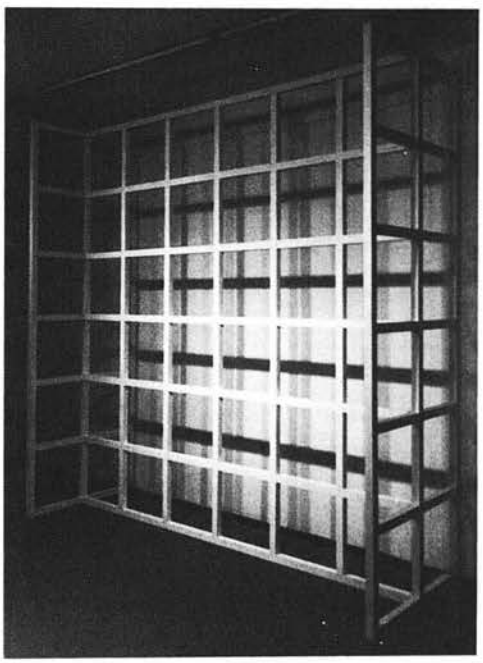


Fig. 3.5 (left) Sol LeWitt, *Double Modular Cube*, 1966, painted wood, 108 x 55 x 55"
Fig. 3.6 (right) Sol LeWitt, *Floor/Wall Grid (H Piece)*, 1966, painted wood, 108 x 108 x 33"
Exhibited at Dwan Gallery, New York, 1966. Photos courtesy of Dwan Gallery Archives

LeWitt's works provide an interesting complement/contrast to Judd's approach in this respect. In contrast to Judd's progressions, the systemic ideas that produced LeWitt's structures were more readily evident. In his gridded structures, shown at the Dwan gallery in 1966 (figs. 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) one could take in the two-dimensional sides, and the horizontal plan and understand how, in a regular grid, their repetitions determined the three-dimensional shape. The flip-side of LeWitt's structural logic, however, was the visual confusion it could engender as one moved around a piece. Viewed from a continuous variety of angles, the work became a surprising and confusing forest: different struts appeared and disappeared as the point of view changed, and relationships mutated. Uprights that actually sat at diagonals from each other appeared briefly side by side, for instance. As Bochner put it,

> When one encounters a LeWitt, although an order is immediately intuited, how to apprehend or penetrate it is nowhere revealed. Instead one is overwhelmed with a mass of data – lines, joints, angles. By controlling so rigidly the conception of the work and never adjusting it to any predetermined ideas of how a work of art should look, LeWitt arrives at a unique perceptual breakdown of conceptual order into visual chaos.[106]

Although LeWitt often argued that 'what the work of art looks like isn't too important,' he also suggested that

> logic may be used to lull the viewer into the belief that he understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation (such as logic versus illogic). Some ideas are logical in conception and illogical perceptually.[107]

LeWitt suggested that he 'lulled' the viewer into inferring a paradoxical situation, when in fact, as with Judd's polarity in opposition, logic and illogic existed simultaneously. His were not either-or structures, but both at once. It was as if LeWitt's works showed what happened in the 'blank spaces' in the grid, to use Foucault's terminology.[108] There

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[106] Ibid., 101
[107] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum*, June 1967 repr., Alicia Legg ed., *Sol LeWitt*, exh. cat., (New York: MOMA, 1978) 166
[108] See above, 87

was an uncanny quality to the bewildering proliferative dimension of LeWitt's works, brought into view by a parallax shift. It was difficult to articulate in words. He demonstrated that a material instance of the series could quickly 'exceed' the system that had produced it. As Smithson attested in 1968, this reflected LeWitt's philosophical scepticism about language generally, 'Sol LeWitt is very much aware of the traps and pitfalls of language, and as a result is also concerned with enervating "concepts" of paradox. Everything LeWitt thinks, writes, or has made is inconsistent and contradictory.'[109]

With LeWitt's gridded structures, the apparent disintegration (or, perhaps better, overload) of the system could have been characterised as incidental, or at least, relatively ephemeral. There were certainly critics who saw only the structure, and not its contradictions. For example, in 1975, Donald Kuspit asserted that LeWitt's sculpture had 'the look of thought.'[110] 'In LeWitt, there is no optical induction; there is only deduction by rules, which have an axiomatic validity however much the work created by their execution has a tentative inconsequential look.'[111] Reading the work in this way led to an altogether different set of intellectual allegiances from the ones I am positing:

> [R]ationalistic, deterministic abstract art links up with a larger Western tradition, apparent in both classical antiquity and the Rennaissance, *viz.*, the pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means. This tradition is profoundly humanist in import, for it involves the deification of the human mind by reason of its mathematical prowess.[112]

Rationalistic? Deterministic? According to Krauss, writing in 1977, Kuspit had it all wrong. She retorted that:

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[109] Robert Smithson, 'A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art', *Art International*, March, 1968, repr., Flam, *Collected Writings*, 80
[110] Donald Kuspit 'Sol LeWitt: The Look of Thought,' *Art in America*, LXIII (September-October, 1975)
[111] Ibid., 48
[112] Ibid

> The experience of the work goes exactly counter to "the look of thought," particularly if thought is understood as classical expressions of logic. For such expressions, whether diagrammatic or symbolic, are precisely about the capacity to abbreviate, to adumbrate, to condense, to be able to apply an expansion with only the first two or three terms, to cover vast arithmetic spaces with a few ellipsis points, to use, in short, the notion of *etcetera*.[113]

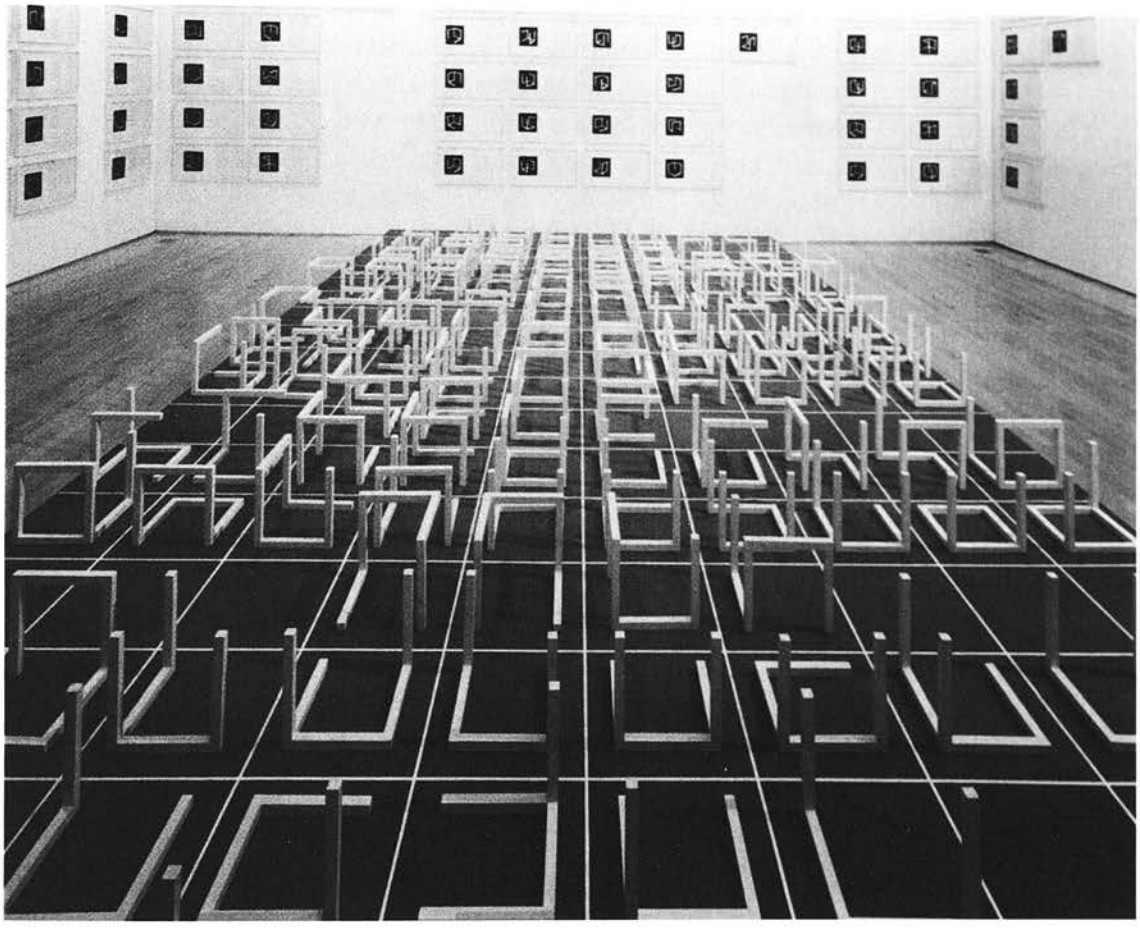

Fig. 3.7 Sol LeWitt, *Incomplete Open Cubes*, 1974, 122 painted wooden structures on a painted wooden base and 122 framed photographs and drawings on paper. Each structure: 8 x 8 x 8", base: 12 x 20 x 216", each framed element 14 x 26". Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund

In LeWitt's his famous *Variations of Incomplete Cubes* from 1974 (fig. 3.7), the tussle between the rational and the irrational was, if anything, more pointed and programmatic than in the mid 1960s lattice works. LeWitt calculated, annotated, built, and finally,

[113] Rosalind Krauss, 'LeWitt in Progress' *October*, New York, 1978, repr., Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986) 253

displayed, every instance of an incomplete open cube (all 122 of them). Commenting on this work, Krauss noted that

> The babble of a LeWitt serial expansion has nothing of the economy of the mathematician's language. It has the loquaciousness of the speech of children or the very old, in that its refusal to summarize, to use the single example that would imply the whole, just like those feverish accounts of events composed of a string of almost identical details, connected by 'and'. [...] But it is not entirely like those examples. For garrulousness, babble, the spasmodic hiccup of repetitious detail, have about them a quality of randomness, disorganization, a lack of system. LeWitt's outporing of example, his piling up of instance, is riddled with system, shot through with order. There is, in *Variations of Incomplete Cubes*, as they say, method in his madness. For what we find is the 'system' of compulsion, of the obsessional's unwavering ritual, with its precision, its neatness, its finicky exactitude, covering an abyss of irrationality.[114]

Like Judd's works, in which, according to Smithson, the ordering structure was 'overrun with anti-matter', LeWitt's gridded objects juxtaposed precise systematic ordering with a glimpse of the 'abyss of rationality' beneath.

Dedifferentiation

Smithson would often cite the psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig's concept of 'dedifferentation,' and in concluding this chapter, it seems pertinent to mention it here in relation to Judd and LeWitt. In *The Hidden Order of Art*, published posthumously in 1967, Ehrenzweig (1908-1966) identified and explored an anti-hierarchical tendency in twentieth century art, which he addressed with specific reference to psychoanalytic structures. Stating that 'Modern art displays [the] attack of unreason on reason quite openly,' he suggested that the antagonistic relationship between the primary (unconscious) and secondary (ego-driven) processes of consciousness was being re-enacted within the work.[115] The unconscious was characterised by its lack of structure, 'Unconscious phantasy does not distinguish between opposites, fails to articulate space

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[114] Ibid., 253-4
[115] Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, 1st edn., London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 1967, (London: Phoenix Press, 2000) xiii

and time as we know it, and allows all firm boundaries to melt in a free and chaotic mingling of forms.'[116] In contrast 'conscious thought is sharply focused and highly differentiated in its elements.'[117] Thus, the primary process was associated with unbounded content, and the secondary, with bringing such content into focus, distinguishing figure and ground, perspective etc. Ehrenzweig's examples of fragmentation in modern art - the piled up, inside-out, multi-perspective Cubist constructions of Picasso and Braque and later the 'gossamer curtains of space' by Pollock - were presented as acts of *de*differentiation: literally, *assaults* on the 'differentiated' artistic convention of perspective, figure and ground.[118] Like Judd and LeWitt, Ehrenzweig did not see this as a struggle between order and disorder, however.

As Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) pointed out in his preface to the 1974 French edition of *The Hidden Order of Art*, Ehrenzweig affirmed 'that the primary processes are not chaotic or disordered in themselves, it is only their encounter with the rigid structures of secondary organization that produces the effect of disorder.'[119] So, staging the struggle between reason and unreason was not a matter of producing disorder so much as asserting one's 'freedom from having to make a choice.'[120] Developing a motif that is of particular interest to our discussion, Ehrenzweig suggested that an undifferentiated structure could be characterised as a 'serial' structure, in which 'all variations are somehow equivalent.'[121] A serial structure called for a particular kind of attention - one associated with the primary, rather than secondary process. Ehrenzweig suggested that 'horizontal' attention was more appropriate, and used a musical example to explain: 'while vertical attention has to select a single melody, horizontal attention

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[116] Ibid., 3
[117] Ibid., xii
[118] Ibid., 69
[119] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Beyond Representation', 1974, in *Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989) p160
[120] Ehrenzweig, 'Hidden Order', 32
[121] Ibid., 34

can comprise all polyphonic voices without choosing between them.'[122] He referred to horizontal attention as 'scanning'. He cited research which had proved that

> unconscious vision is [...] capable of scanning serial structures and gathering more information than a conscious scrutiny lasting a hundred times longer. With impartial acuity, subliminal vision registers details irrespective of whether they belong to the figure or to the ground. It tends to reverse the conscious preference for the figure and pays more attention to textural and background elements.[123]

Ehrenzweig's analysis suggested that a serial structure might be seen as a counter to, rather than an extension of, a systemic structure. Although he wrote about serialism in music, Ehrenzweig did not consider visual art after the Abstract Expressionists (or indeed, outside painting). This was a missed opportunity. As we have seen, at the time he was writing in the mid 1960s, Judd and others were involved in negotiating these very tensions, and were using serial forms to both block and overwhelm systemic thinking. Much of their work prompts the scanning attention Ehrenzweig described. In the late 1960s, Smithson and Morris both frequently referred to Ehrenzweig,[124] and though he did not address 'system art' directly, his work certainly contributed to the critical discourse around it. I want to finish this chapter with another quote from Lyotard's 1974 preface. He concluded that a new 'account of the economy of works of art [...] cast in libidinal terms' was called for - an account that

> would have as its central presupposition the affirmative character of works: there are not in place of anything; they do not stand for, but stand; that is to say, they function through their material and its organization. Their subject is nothing other than a possible formal organization (not an inevitable or necessary organisation)... There is only surface.[125]

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[122] Ibid., 32
[123] Ibid., 33
[124] Morris, for example, cited Ehenzweig's statement, 'Our attempt at focusing must give way to the vacant all-embracing stare,' at the beginning of his 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects', Artforum 7:8, April 1969, repr., Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, (London, England and Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995) 57. Smithson drew on Ehrenzweig's concept of dedifferentiation to describe Tony Smith's state of mind during his famous car-ride on the turnpike, in 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', *Artforum*, September 1968, repr. Flam, *Collected Writings*, 103
[125] Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', 158

Chapter 4
Illusionism

In the previous chapter, I argued that serial art works were understood to signify, not through figurative allusion, but through an assessment of their 'material and organisation.' It was widely understood that serial works, such as the abstract sculptures of Judd, Flavin, LeWitt and Morris, thus mounted a challenge to metaphorical interpretation. These issues found crystallised expression in a polemic against 'illusionism'. The parameters of this debate were largely established, on the minimalist side, by Judd's 1965 survey essay 'Specific Objects,' published in *Arts Yearbook* in 1965, and Morris's series of four essays entitled 'Notes on Sculpture,' published in *Artforum* between February 1966 and April 1969. Both artists argued in support of an art of single, clearly defined objects that did not 'ape' other things in the world, and which implicated viewers in a direct relationship with the object. To this end, they made specific edicts about form, colour, the orchestration of light and so on in their articles, which were widely received as manifestos. A close reading of these articles reveals critical disagreements, and indeed mutual critique, between the artists. The passion and urgency with which these minutiae were debated seems puzzling today. A great deal of significance was attributed to formal choices that may appear, to our eyes, to be utterly neutral. Thus, a close and detailed reading of these articles is necessary in order to explain the parameters of the anti-illusionist polemic and the priorities of two of its major exponents. More importantly, such a reading will allow me to speculate about the underlying anxieties which may have prompted these debates in the first place.

'Specific Objects'

In 1965, after several years of writing exhibition reviews, Judd could identify and characterize certain tendencies in art with some authority. 'Specific Objects' expressed his own artistic priorities, (although he deliberately forbore to mention his own work in

detail[1]), and constructed a particular characterisation of abstraction. He argued that the 'best new work' of his generation, while it did not amount to a movement, and would never wholly supersede 'painting' or 'sculpture', nevertheless challenged both. For Judd, the main challenge to painting (initiated by the Abstract Expressionist painters) had been to increasingly emphasize 'the rectangle as a definite form,' so that it was no longer the 'fairly neutral limit' that it had been before 1946.[2] By making the painting-as-image less pictorial and less illusionistic, the painting-as-object was brought more emphatically to attention. Nevertheless, according to Judd, even these radical paintings could not avoid being read as pictures: 'almost all paintings are spatial in one way or another.'[3] Most sculpture too, Judd claimed, was 'like the painting that preceded Pollock, Rothko, Still and Newman,' in that the 'parts and the space are allusive, descriptive and somewhat naturalistic.'[4] Taking Di Suvero's work as an example (fig. 4.1), Judd explained:

> Di Suvero uses beams as if they were brush strokes, imitating movement, as Kline did. The material never has its own movement. A beam thrusts, a piece of iron follows a gesture; together they form a naturalistic and anthropomorphic image. The space corresponds.[5]

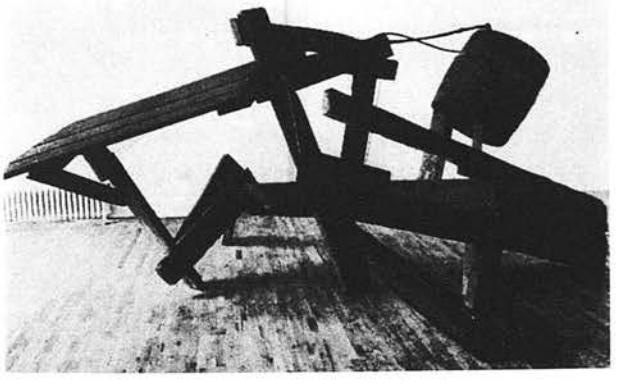

Fig. 4.1 Mark Di Suvero, *Barrell*, 1960 (now destroyed)

Judd thus equated pictorial illusion in painting with anthropomorphic allusion in sculpture. For him, both were problematic in contemporary work because they set up

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[1] Judd makes a note that 'The editor, not I included the photograph of my work.' Judd, 'Specific Objects', repr. *Complete Writings*, (1975), 189
[2] Ibid., 182
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 183
[5] Ibid.

internal contrasts, variations and hierarchies that, as we saw in the last chapter, he felt had already been played out artistically. A few years earlier, Judd had quoted approvingly Ingres' insistence that 'expression cannot be good if it has not been formulated with absolute exactitude.' As an empiricist, what Judd seemed to dislike more than anything was the effect of composition on the focus of a work - a generalizing or unifying effect blurred a work's exactitude.

> Most sculpture is made part by part, by addition, composed. The main parts remain fairly discrete. They and the small parts are a collection of variations, slight through great. There are hierarchies of clarity and strength and of proximity to one or two main ideas. Wood and metal are the usual materials, either alone or together, and if together it is without much of a contrast. There is seldom any colour. The middling contrast and the natural monochrome are general and help to unify the parts.[6]

In contrast to this, Judd cited a long list of artists (including Yves Klein and Frank Stella, who were exceptional in producing paintings that were not 'spatial') whose work avoided such compositional variations. For Judd,

> It isn't necessary for a work to have lots of things to look at. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole is what is interesting. The main things are alone, and are more intense, clear and powerful. They are not diluted by an inherited format, variations of a form, mild contrasts and connecting parts or areas... In the new work the shape, image, colour and surface are single and not partial and scattered. There aren't any neutral or moderate areas or parts, any connections or transitional areas.[7]

These works seemed to encroach on the viewer's space; sometimes as 'an object, a single thing,' and sometimes as an 'open and extended, more or less environmental [situation].'[8] In both cases, he suggests, 'Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of [ie the tension between] illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colours...'[9] Eliminating this tension allowed the artwork to confront the viewer directly.

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 187
[8] Ibid., 183
[9] Ibid., 184

Similarly, Judd valued new industrial materials and colours that he felt had not yet accrued cultural associations, so that the viewer would be more likely to concentrate on the specific, present encounter with the work. 'If [materials such as 'formica, aluminium, cold-rolled steel, plexiglas, red and common brass, and so forth'] are used directly, they are more specific. Also they are usually aggressive. There is an objectivity to the obdurate identity of a material.'[10] Judd's enthusiasm for the 'single thing' – an aggressive and obdurate thing, moreover – is instructive. Although Judd rarely referred to the audience, his terminology here suggests that he believed the viewer ought to be challenged in new ways: these materials were 'not as accessible as oil on canvas,' they were 'hard to relate to one another,' they weren't 'obviously art.'[11] Such challenging circumstances for the viewer enhanced the rewards to be gleaned. They ensured that the work was powerful and compelling, and did not resemble ordinary objects in the viewer's experience. They defamilarised artistic perception, we might say.

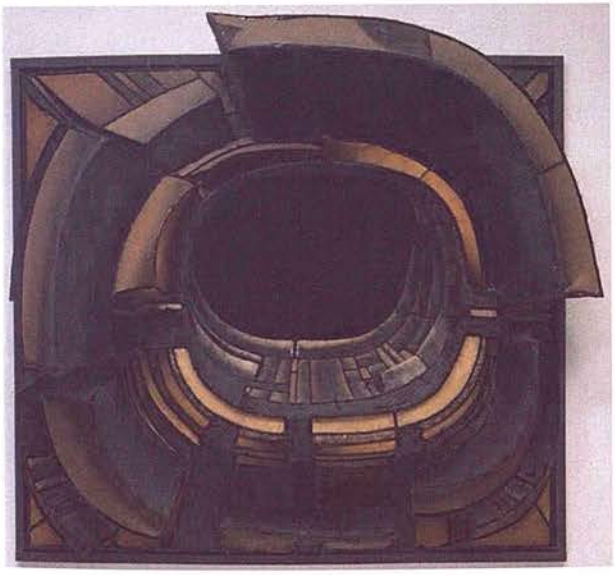

Fig. 4.2 Lee Bontecou, *Untitled*, 1961
Welded steel, canvas, black fabric, copper wire, and soot, 6' 8 1/4" x 7' 5" x 34 3/4" (203.6 x 226 x 88 cm). Kay Sage Tanguy Fund

It is worth emphasising that Judd valued 'specific' objects primarily because their forms were *surprising*. His praise for works by Lee Bontecou and Claes Oldenburg are best understood in this light. In his discussion of the work of Lee Bontecou at the end of 'Specific Objects', for instance, Judd conceded that her abstract metal reliefs (fig 4.2)

[10] Ibid., 187
[11] Ibid.

were essentially 'images.'[12] But these 'images' were not illusionistic, even if they were analogical - all ideas derived from the form, not vice versa. Bontecou's forms remained a lesson in 'wholeness.' Consider *Untitled*, 1961, a strange metal protuberance with a void at its centre. Judd argues that 'The parts are part of the hole or part of the mound which forms the hole.'[13] The mound and hole may have been two things in language, but they amounted to only one thing in actuality – another example, perhaps, of the specific object as a 'polarity in alliance.' He claimed,

> The image is primarily a single emotive one, which alone wouldn't resemble the old imagery so much, but to which internal and external references, such as violence and war, have been added. The additions are somewhat pictorial, but the image is essentially new and surprising; the image has never before been the whole work, been so large, been so explicit and aggressive.[14]

He argued that the work did not contain allusions in the traditional sense, but associations could nevertheless be 'added' to the image. Judd's more detailed review of the same work in April 1965 serves to clarify this distinction. 'The black hole does not allude to a black hole; it is one. The image does suggest things, but by analogy. The image is one thing among similar things.'[15] In other words, an 'image' is not the visible surface of an idea contained in the work - it is simply one image among many that can be connected to the form through some kind of affinity, like the members of an open sequence class.

Judd described the way that the work evoked certain feelings through its definite form – suspense, apprehension, desire – which conjured up analogical situations without explicitly referring to them. Thus,

> The image cannot be contemplated; it has to be dealt with as an object, at least viewed with puzzlement and wariness, as would be any strange object, and at most seen with terror, as would be a beached mine or a well hidden in the grass. The image extends from something as social as war to something as private as sex, making one an aspect of the other… The image also extends from bellicosity,

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[12] Ibid., 188
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Donald Judd, 'Lee Bontecou,' *Arts Magazine*, April 1965, repr. *Complete Writings*, (1975), 178

> both martial and psychological – aspects which do not equate – to invitation, erotic and psychological, and deathly as well.[16]

For me, this indicates an important provision in Judd's rhetoric. It posits an analogical reading of abstract sculpture that I will draw on later, in relation to the work of Mona Hatoum, and indeed, Judd's own. That these 'additions' (references) were 'somewhat pictorial,'[17] was less problematic for Judd than it might have been, because the formal surprise of the object served to ground any and all potential analogies in the specificity of that object. 'Rather than inducing idealization and generalization and being allusive, it excludes. The works asserts its own existence, form and power. It becomes an object in its own right.'[18]

Fig. 4.3 Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Switches (Version 2)*, 1963-9, Vinyl filled with dacron and canvas, 105 x 105 x 29.9 cm, Collection of William Hokin; courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Judd championed the work of Claes Oldenburg, on this basis. With reference to his giant 'grossly anthropomorphized' versions of manmade things out of flaccid plastic (fig. 4.3), Judd said, 'Oldenburg exaggerates the accepted or chosen form and turns it into one of

[16] Judd, 'Lee Bontecou,' 179
[17] Judd, 'Specific Objects', 188
[18] Judd, Lee Bontecou, 178

his own.'[19] He praised Oldenburg's objects on the basis that Oldenburg moved so far beyond the thing he was 'representing' that the mimetic relationship was severed, and the viewer could only react to the extraordinary object he or she was presented with. For Judd, it was not necessary (or indeed, possible) to exclude allusion, as long as the work of art could hold its own against external association. Judd preferred Oldenburg's approach to those of 'George Brecht and Robert Morris' who used 'real objects and depend[ed] on the viewer's knowledge of these objects.'[20] As Judd attested later, he personally 'wanted to get rid of all those extraneous meanings – connections to things that didn't mean anything to the art.'[21] This sounds like a contradiction, but Judd was indicating where he felt the priority should lie. He preferred strange objects that generated associations, over blank objects that relied on association to make them interesting.

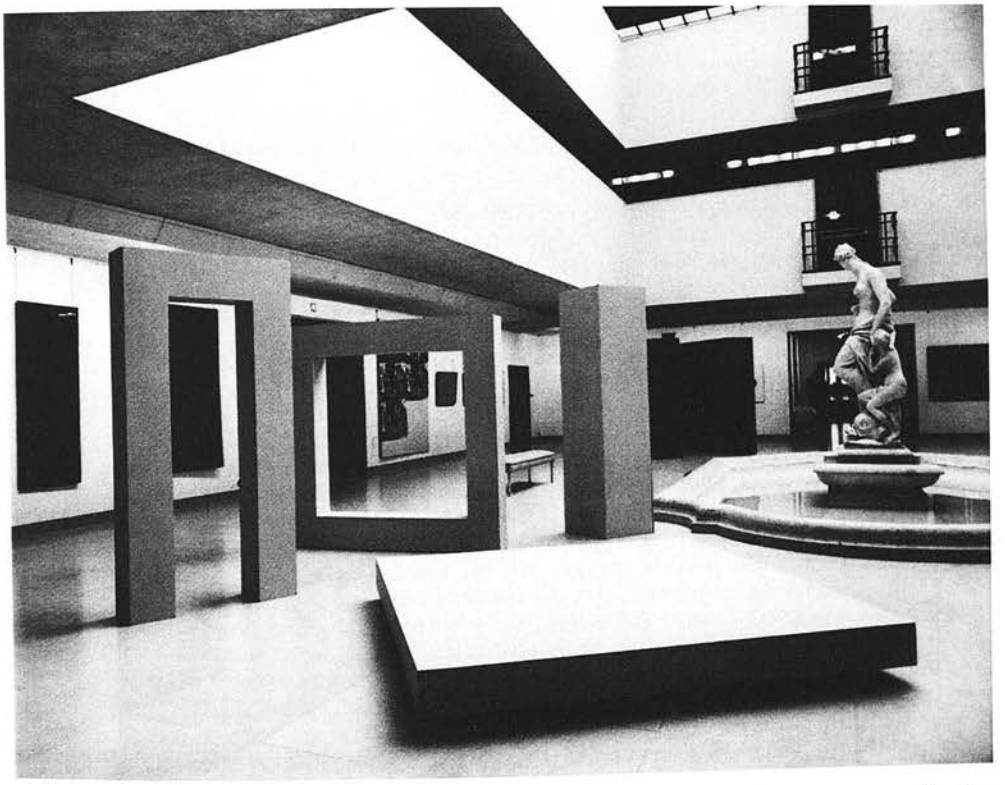

Fig. 4.4 Exhibition view, 'Black, White and Gray', The Wadsworth Athaneum, Hartford, Conn., 1964 (showing Robert Morris's *Slab,* 1962, in the foreground)

[19] Judd, 'Specific Objects', 189
[20] Ibid.
[21] 'Don Judd: Interview with John Coplans,' in *Don Judd*, (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1971), p. 32

In a review of an early show by Morris in 1963, Judd's qualms were already evident. Although he was intrigued by Morris's project, he could not get over the impression that the objects were not very interesting in themselves. 'The large pieces are medium gray and completely bare. The understatement of these boxes is clear enough and potentially interesting, but there isn't, after all, much to look at.'[22] The next year, he had come to understand and appreciate Morris's work as the 'extreme of the inclusive attitude', an attitude seen previously in Rauschenberg's early white paintings. He felt this attitude nevertheless tended to produce work that was 'barely present,' and although he praised *Slab*, shown in the group exhibition *Black, White and Gray*, (fig. 4.4) and commended Morris's attempts to deny Western art's 'very hierarchical values,' he once again expressed the need for 'more to think about and look at.'[23]

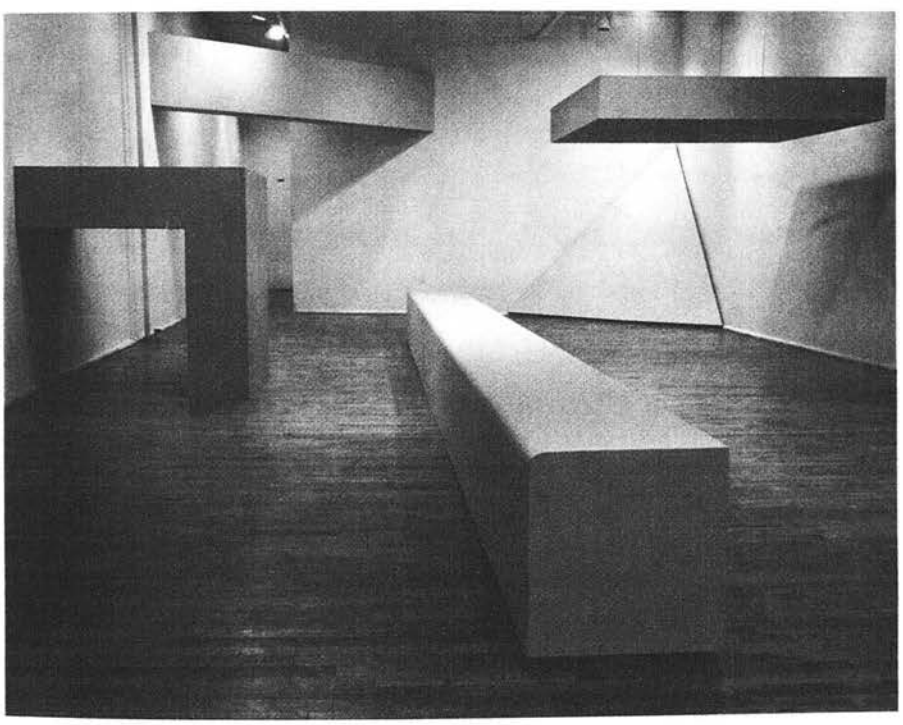

Fig. 4.5 Robert Morris, one-person show, Green Gallery, New York, 1964, courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York. *Cloud*, 1962, is suspended on the right (now destroyed).

[22] Donald Judd, 'In the Galleries,' *Arts Magazine*, May/June 1963, repr., *Complete Writings* (1975), 90
[23] Donald Judd, 'Nationwide Reports: Hartford -Black, White and Gray' *Arts Magazine*, March 1964, repr., *Complete Writings* (1975), 117

Although he liked 'Cloud' when he saw it at the Green Gallery in 1964 (fig. 4.5), a problem arose, he felt, with the title - as he recounted later to Colpitt:

> [Judd] explained that when Morris titled his suspended rectangular sculpture *Cloud,* he *meant* cloud. Morris's 'cloud' – solid, planar and rectilinear – is an absurd object reminiscent of Man Ray's *Cadeau* of 1921, an iron that has a pressing surface studded with tacks, rendering it humourously – and threateningly - non functional. Morris is indeed producing real objects, but not 'specifically.' Comprehension of this art depends on recognition of the identity and functions of its materials and references in the world outside art.[24]

Judd again described such 'Dada' interests as 'very alien' to him.[25]

'Notes on Sculpture'

Like Judd, Morris also attempted a survey of new work, although his analysis in 'Notes on Sculpture' took the form of general critical observations, rather than appraisals of particular works. Morris preferred to retain the term 'sculpture,' because he felt that 'object' was not specific enough to art. We will see that when he employed the word 'object' in Part 3 it was to refer to works that were 'minor' in scale and ambition. He equated 'objects' with '*objet[s] d'art.*'[26] In Part 4, which was entitled 'Beyond Objects', he contrasted Judd's category of 'specific object' unfavourably with his own, new, 'anti-form' art. In any case, Morris sidelined Judd's claim to transcend the inherited distinctions of painting and sculpture.

In Part 1, published in February 1966, Morris sought to revitalize the reputation of sculpture by claiming it had long-standing anti-pictorial credentials: 'the concerns of

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[24] Frances Colpitt, citing an interview with Judd, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990) 12

[25] 'Bob Morris' Dada interests are very alien to me and there is a lot in his dogmatic articles that I don't like.' Judd, 'Complaints: part 1,' 198

[26] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non Sequiturs' *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (June 1967), repr., Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England: MIT Press, 1993) 25 (original emphasis),

sculpture have been for some time not only distinct but hostile to those of painting.'[27] Morris, adopting a pseudo-Greenbergian stance, identified painting and sculpture with optical and physical values respectively, and placed them in opposition to each other. Inevitably, objects have many properties: colour, texture, scale, mass and so on. Morris explained that he preferred strong, simple works where such properties 'are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation.'[28] Although he acknowledges that 'things exist as coloured,' he nevertheless complains about the 'use of colour' in sculpture, because it 'emphasizes the optical and in so doing subverts the physical.'[29] 'The more neutral hues' he argued, 'allow for the maximum focus on those essential physical decisions that inform sculptural works.'[30] In 'Specific Objects', Judd too had argued for works in which 'the shape, image, colour and surface are single and not partial and scattered.'[31] In the context of his own practice, this generally meant that each material had its own colour, and each surface was made of one material. However, in 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', published the following October, Morris argued that when colours were bright, or a surface was 'sensuous' or 'impressive,' as was often the case with Judd, these qualities 'detach themselves from the whole of the work to become one more internal relationship.'[32] 'The better new work,' Morris felt, 'takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer esthetic.'[33]

While Judd tended to focus on the object as an arresting entity in one's visual field, for Morris it was a priority that the viewer should take note of how a plain sculptural object altered in appearance according to the natural variations of space and light. 'Some of the best of the new work, being more open and neutral in terms of surface incident, is more

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[27] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 1,' *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 6 (February 1966), repr., Morris, *Continuous Project*, 3
[28] Ibid., 6
[29] Ibid., 4-5
[30] Ibid.,.5
[31] Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', p187
[32] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,' *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 2, (October 1966), repr., Morris, *Continuous Project*, 14
[33] Ibid.,15

sensitive to the varying contexts of space and light in which it exists.'[34] This drew attention to the overall viewing context, and to the act of viewing:

> [This new work] reflects more acutely these two properties [of light and space] and is more noticeably changed by them. In some sense it takes these two things into itself, as its variation is a function of their variation. Even its most patently unalterable property, shape, does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work. Oddly, it is the strength of the constant, known shape, the gestalt, that allows this awareness to become so much more emphatic in these works than in previous sculpture. [35]

The viewer became aware, too, of the passage of time, during the encounter. Morris made a distinction between the succession of views accumulated through time as one circumnavigated a known simple shape, and the various views seen simultaneously in a Cubist image. The latter represented a '*retardataire*' aesthetic, he felt.[36] He equated internal relations and optical complexities in objects to the 'simultaneous views in one plane' of Cubism.[37] In order for simple successive views to command the attention of the viewer, Morris argued that light and space must operate in particular, that is to say, *uninflected*, ways. The haloes of coloured light projected by Judd's Plexiglas elements, the simultaneously translucent and reflective qualities of his objects, made the 'known' shape of a part-Plexiglas object more difficult to retain in the mind.

For similar reasons, in Part 3, included in the June 1967 issue of *Artforum*, Morris argued that space ought to be 'taken in' in a particular way: there ought to be an open framing, or 'reserving' of space rather than a *containing* of space:

> Successful work in this direction differs from both previous sculpture (and from objects) in that its focus is not singularly inward and exclusive of the context of its spatial setting. It is less introverted in respect to its surroundings. Sometimes this is achieved by literally opening up the form in order that the surroundings must of necessity be seen with the piece. (Transparency and translucency of material function in a different way in this respect, because they maintain an inner

[34] Ibid.,16
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 14, original emphasis
[37] Ibid., 17

> core that is seen through but is nevertheless closed off.) Other work makes this extroverted inclusiveness felt in other ways – sometimes through the distribution of volumes, sometimes through blocking off or "reserving" amounts of space that the work does not physically occupy.[38]

To illustrate Morris's prescriptions, let us return to his *Slab*, (1962) (fig. 4.4) which was an eight foot slab suspended a few inches off the floor, thereby 'reserving' the space beneath it. His L-Beams from 1965-7 (fig. 4.6), also 8 foot by 8 foot, tended to frame space between their right-angled legs, depending on how they were arranged. In contrast, translucent and reflective materials (like those used in Judd's Plexiglas boxes) captured space, rather than opened onto it. Morris complained, too, that 'high reflectiveness incorporating part of the surroundings' set up 'an internal relation,' and that transparency did 'the same thing more literally.'[39]

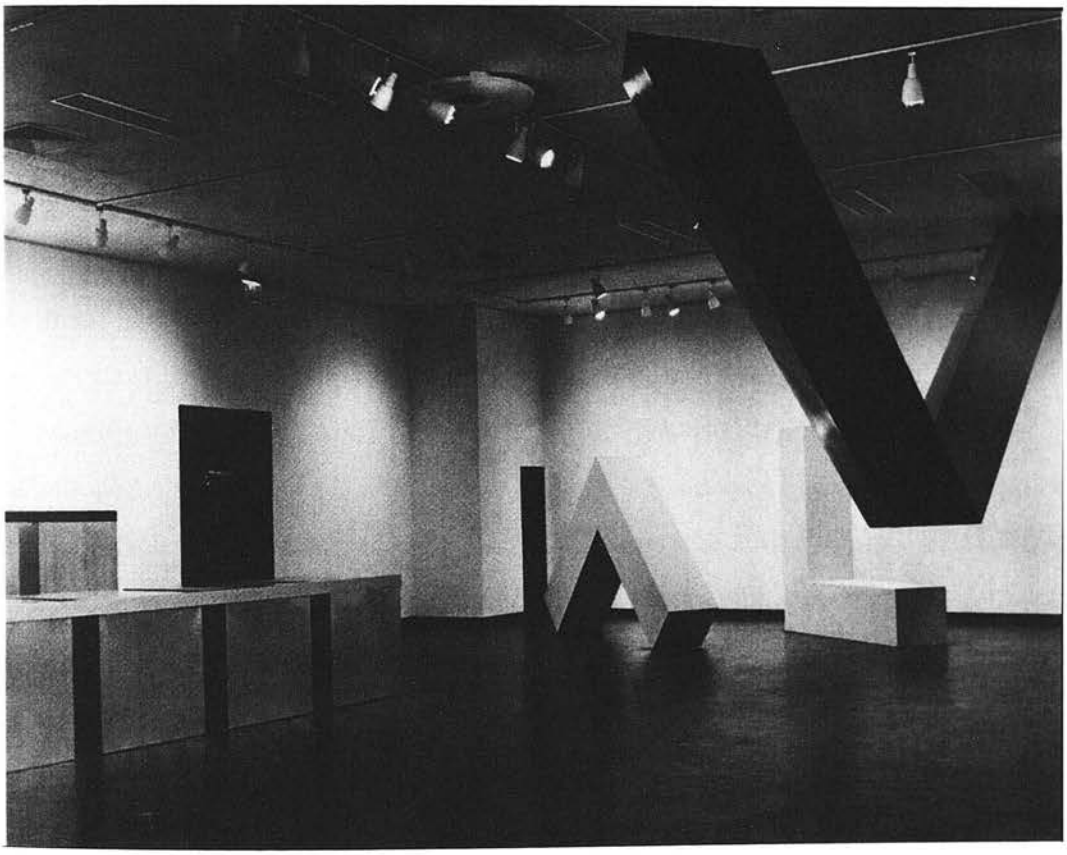

Fig. 4.6 installation view, *Primary Structures*, Jewish Museum, New York, 1966. Robert Morris, *Untitled (2 L- Beams),* 1965-7 is in the background.

[38] Morris, 'Notes, Part 3,' 26
[39] Ibid., 25

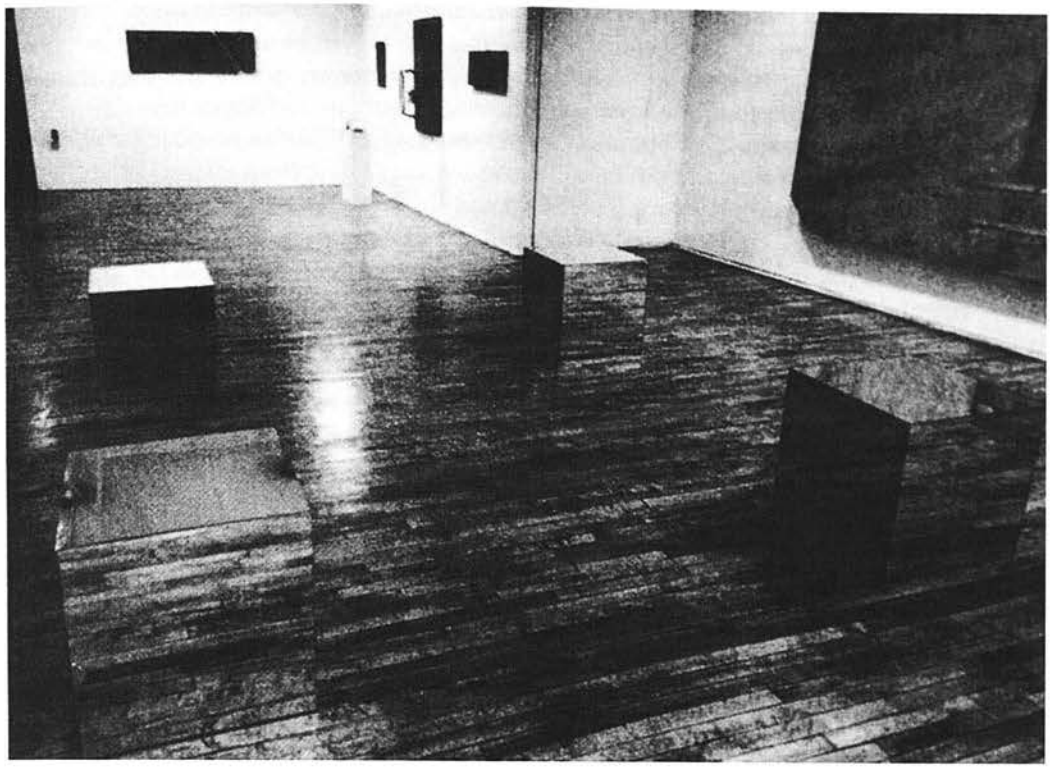

Fig. 4.7 Robert Morris, one-person show, Green Gallery, New York, 1965, courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York, showing *Mirrored Cubes*, 1965.

Morris did not name names or cite specific examples in his 'Notes on Sculpture,' and it was not always clear if he approved or disapproved of the formal strategies that he outlined in detail, some of which he had used himself. He appeared to condemn highly reflective surfaces that 'incorporated' their surroundings, and yet one of his most interesting pieces did exactly this (fig. 4.7). (In fact, as I show later, Morris acknowledged in the late 1970s that he had had a blind-spot in relation to reflection in the mid-1960s).[40] His critique of reflection at this time was aimed at work like Judd's, which was close to, but distinguishable from his own. Works with strong colours, smooth finishes and repetitive rhythms, he wrote, although they often have strong physical presences, 'make great use of the traditional range of plastic values: light, shadow, rhythms, pulses, negative spaces, positive forms, etc,' and are 'often unambitious or indulgently focused on surface.'[41] The lesser examples 'read as a kind of candy box art – new containers for an industrial sensuality reminiscent of the Bauhaus sensibility for

[40] See below, 142
[41] Morris, 'Notes, Part 3,' 25

refined objects of clean order and high finish.'[42] Even the better work, he concluded, amounted to 'a new convention that is not sculptural in intent, but rather more like the emergence of a rich minor art – much as stained glass and mosaics differed from the conventions of painting.'[43] The refined richness of such art was precisely what Morris found objectionable – it risked being received as merely picturesque. Did other critics perceive this 'risk'? I will consider later the way that commentators regarded the richness of Judd's work. But first, how did Judd respond to Morris' critiques?

In a 1968 interview with Lucy Lippard, after the publication of the first three parts of 'Notes on Sculpture,' Judd expressed irritation at Morris's lack of specifics:

> Judd: I didn't like Morris's article in Artforum because I don't know who he is talking about, whether it's himself, or it's my work, which I sometimes think it is... At one point he goes on about reliefs and I don't know who he is talking about.
> Lippard: That one has to be you. I don't know who else it could be.
> Judd: Whether he is cutting his throat about all those old lead reliefs he did, or whether it's me... If he's going to talk about me on the wall, I wish he'd mention me and make it clear who he's talking about. [44]

Here, Judd was referring to Morris's view, expressed in Parts 1 and 3, that relief was pictorial. Morris argued that relief shared a space with painting, it limited the number of views to be had, and it did not 'confront gravity' as he felt sculpture should.[45] Later, in an interview with Coplans in 1971, the reason for Judd's annoyance became clear. He conceded that low relief had been problematically pictorial at the beginning, but explained that he had strived long and hard to overcome relief's spatial illusionism. He eventually succeeded, he felt, with the discovery of a particular proportion of width and projection that prevented the object being read as an image. [46] (See, for example, fig. 4.8). That this was not apparently understood by Morris must have been provoking for Judd.

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., referring to a point made by Barbara Rose in *A New Aesthetic,* (Washington, DC: Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1967) (no page ref)
[44] Meyer, *Art and Polemics,* 157, citing Lucy Lippard, interview with Donald Judd, April 10, 1968. (Transcript in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C)
[45] Morris, 'Notes, Part 1,' 4 , and 'Notes, Part 3,' 25
[46] Coplans, 'Don Judd: Interview,' 21-3.

Ironically, considering the variety in Morris's practice, his edicts in the late 1960s seemed more inflexible than Judd's.

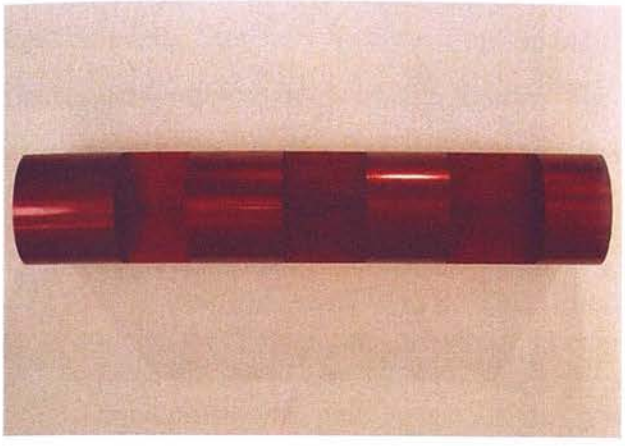

Fig. 4.8, Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1965, Glavanized iron and red enamel, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Fig. 4.9, Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1968, felt, asphalt, mirrors, wood, copper tubing, steel cable, lead (dimensions variable), The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Philip Johnson

Artforum ran 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects,' in April 1969. In 1968, Morris's sculpture had moved away from a minimalist style, towards a new, anti-form aesthetic, (fig. 4.9). Now, Morris was less equivocal about condemning specific objects, and did not seem to mind implicating his own previous ways of working in the process. 'Minimal art', though its proponents denied it, was engaged in a kind of composition:

> Previously [prior to anti-form art] it was one or two materials and a single or repetitive form to contain them. Any more and the work began to engage in part-to-part and part-to-whole relationships. Even so, Minimal art, with two or three substances, gets caught in plays of relationships between transparencies and

> solids, voids and shadows, and the parts separate and the work ends in a kind of demure and unadmitted composition.[47]

Morris seemed to think that the denial of such pictorial values was disingenuous, or at least deluded. Similarly he argued that specific objects, although they did not resemble figures, nevertheless behaved like figures. The resulting sensation in confronting these quasi-figures was 'denied or repressed' because it seemed inappropriate:

> The specific art object of the 1960s is not so much a metaphor for the figure as it is an existence parallel to it. This is undoubtedly why subliminal, generalized kinaesthetic responses are strong in confronting object art. Such responses are often denied or repressed because they seem patently inappropriate in the face of nonanthropomorphic forms, yet they are there.[48]

The continuation of a figure-ground relation in minimalism was another example of its 'retardataire' aesthetic, Morris claimed:

> So called Minimal art fulfilled the project of reconstituting art as objects while at the same time sharing the same perceptual conditions as figurative sculpture. Both objects and figures in real space maintain a figure-ground relation. This is not a depicted relation as in representational painting, but an actual one of differentiated subject within neutral field. When the human figure is no longer viable, the continuing impulse to isolate a thing must find another subject.[49]

Such works had been necessary, he suggested, as the 'first step away from illusionism, allusion and metaphor,' but this mode, in requiring from the artist the 'preconception of a whole image,' now seemed primitive to Morris 'because it involves implicitly asserting forms as being prior to substances.'[50] Such a mode produced a contradiction between the expected nonanthropomorphic effect of the object, and an actual response to the object as a kind of 'figure'. Having ceased to make 'object' art himself, Morris now presented his new anti-form scattered works of the late 1960s as a means of moving beyond the

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[47] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects', Artforum 7:8 (April 1969), repr. Morris, *Continuous Project*, 60-1
[48] Ibid., 54
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 67

problem of vestigial illusion. Anti-form art, he claimed, used 'as its beginnings and as its means, stuff, substances in many states – from chunks, to particles, to slime, to whatever – and pre-thought images are neither necessary nor possible.'[51]

So what cause did these mutual critiques between Judd and Morris serve? Why were these fine points of detail regarding the use of light, space and ordering considered so important? Judd and Morris agreed on the broader importance of moving away from illusionistic forms of art, but they evidently differed on how this was best achieved.

What was wrong with illusionism?

Through their programmatic writings about contemporary art, Judd and Morris implicitly cast themselves in the role of exemplars; their avant-garde credentials were placed in the balance. With their articles, Judd and Morris each staked a claim to prominence within the anti-illusionism debate. Their disagreements about form demonstrated a divergence of opinion not just about detail, but about where each felt the meaning of sculpture ought, and ought not, to be located. For Judd, new thoughts were best prompted by the surprising and specific nature of an unusual object, whereas Morris (at least in the mid 1960s) was more interested in drawing attention to the way a sculptural shape was perceived in its wider context. In pursuing their different priorities, each felt the other opened themselves up to certain dangers. Judd thought Morris's interest in appropriation re-introduced allusion, and Morris thought the inner relations in Judd's works constituted a disavowed composition. Morris also worried that 'objects' (including his own) could not avoid anthropomorphism. Allusion, composition and anthropomorphism were all aspects of 'illusionism' as they and others had defined and criticised it.

The polemical point-scoring may not have impinged significantly on the common purpose of anti-illusionism as it was broadly understood, but it confirmed that the issue was shot through with tensions. Was this because the 'problem' of illusionism reflected a dilemma that was not easily resolved, because it pertained to an intractable predicament of modern experience? Apart from finding that figurative representation was

[51] Ibid.

unfashionably fictional, and had in recent years been associated with propagandist social realism, Judd and Morris also rejected illusionistic space because it placed the viewer - who occupied *literal* space - in a disjunctive relation with the work. The viewer of painting (even abstract painting) was forced to adopt a viewpoint associated with perspective – a position 'external' to the scene. Such a position tended to reinstate a Cartesian model of consciousness. I showed in chapter 1 that, since the 19th century, this supposedly 'detached' subject position had been exposed as a construction, a myth. Although European modernist practices had furthered the assault on perspective, they did not go far enough for Judd and Morris. In the last chapter I recounted how Judd dismissed qualities of European art on the grounds that they were 'linked up with a philosophy - rationalism, rationalistic philosophy,' which he argued, was 'discredited now as a way of finding out what the world's like.'[52] Morris, too, evidently considered that pandering to such a subject position in art was self-deluding and tended to preserve the precious aura of the art object. He was most interested, as we have seen, in the taking 'relationships out of the work and mak[ing] them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision.'[53] Accusing an artist of 'illusionism', then, suggested that they had not managed to 'free' themselves from 'outmoded' philosophical forms, and were not equipped to interrogate the increasingly immersive experience of mid-century modernity. It was a way of disputing their avant-garde credentials, certainly, but was there something more at stake?

In 1968, curator and art historian Jack Burnham argued that '*The specific function of modern didactic art has been to show that art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and the components of their environment.*'[54] In Burnham's definition of the 'systemic' works, the 'system' they reflected upon was the field of relations in which art operated. This kind of work, he argued, drew the viewer into a self-conscious assessment of the field that included both work and viewer, making their own part in the system palpable to them. This immersion differed from the fantasmatic

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[52] Glaser, 'Questions,' 151
[53] Morris, 'Notes Part 2,' 15
[54] Jack Burnham, 'Systems Esthetics,' *Artforum* (Sept 1968) reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Esthetics Contemporary*, (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1978), 162 (original emphasis)

projection involved in illusionism, in that the viewer *found* themselves immersed in the 'real', rather than momentarily *losing* themselves in a fiction.

Judd would not have allowed that his objects should simply be regarded as part of an environment – should be seen as 'but one of the terms in the newer esthetic,'[55] to quote Morris – but he did seek to inspire the same self-conscious questioning. For Judd, 'specific objects' were a special class of objects that, in their strangeness and surprise, provoked a glitch in expectations, and prompted a fruitful and revealing re-orientation of attention. They interrupted the usual perceptual processes, and played with visual hierarchies. As we saw in chapter 1, such strategies of defamiliarisation, as they had been deployed in the past, were intended to make the normative processes of seeing visible, and thereby reveal them as habitual. Judd pursued the same aim, through different means.

In their different ways, Morris and Judd's works prompted philosophical reflections about art *and* questions about consciousness. As we have seen, artistic issues were elaborated at length in their critical writing. Questions of consciousness, in contrast, were less easily addressed in language. Speculations about perception and subjecthood were prompted, rather, by the complex phenomenological impact of the works. They were grounded in the visceral rather than the intellectual. Perhaps it was this distinction which contributed to a sense of disjunction between the artists' theoretical projects and the works. Was the resultant feeling of disorientation amongst critics further compounded by the impression that an individual work often constituted a conundrum in itself? In the survey of reviews and critical commentary published from the middle of the decade onwards that I undertake here, two types of conundrum emerge: disavowed anthropomorphism, and optical illusions generated by shadows and reflections. What did critics make of these 'secret' aspects of minimalism? We will find a recurring theme in the critical discussions about Judd and Morris's latent illusionism: that the most fertile ground for critical reflection was precisely the pieces' ambivalence. It was through the *contradictions* in the work that expectations were challenged, and viewers became active

[55] Morris, 'Notes, Part 2,' 15

in their interpretation. In so doing, the works often created a split in the viewers' consciousness, as viewers saw themselves seeing.

Hidden

In 1969, as we have seen, Morris commented that 'subliminal, generalized kinaesthetic responses are strong in confronting object art.'[56] By this time, a number of critics had commented on the fact that minimal objects seemed to have a secret life of their own. Stripped of the usual plinths and frames, minimalist works encroached on viewers in their own space, while at the same time appearing to give little away. Their apparent self-sufficiency endowed the works with an aura of silence, and this perceived *muteness* was particularly vivid when the works were box-like, and/or had closed-off sections, as if they contained a secret. Like Stanley Kubrick's monoliths in his 1968 film, *2001: Space Odyssey*, it was as if they were *pointedly* ignoring the spectator. As Colpitt observed later, in 1990,

> The fact of the total abstractness of minimal art resulted in a personification of its objects. The objects are not formally similar to human beings, yet their complete self-sufficiency encouraged the critic and the spectator to treat them as other beings.[57]

The self-consciousness that this generated on the part of the viewer could thus be seen either positively, as a force for greater criticality and self-awareness, or negatively, as an alienating experience.

In 1965, Rose described the 'bewildering' effect of these 'bland, neutral and redundant' objects on the spectator:

> In the face of so much nothing, [the spectator] is still experiencing something, and usually a rather unhappy something at that. I have often thought one had a sense of loss looking at these big, blank, empty things, so anxious to cloak their art identity that they were masquerading as objects. Perhaps, what one senses is that,

[56] Morris, 'Notes, Part 4,' 54
[57] Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, 72

> opposed to the florid baroque fullness of the *Angst*-ridden older generation, the hollow barrenness of the void has a certain, if strangled, expressiveness.[58]

What is interesting here is that contemporaries had started to read 'minimal' objects as if they were people: dysfunctional, 'anxious' people that denied their own natures, that were involved in 'masquerade'. Rose suggested that, even though it was probably not an intended effect, such 'hollow barrenness' might be an apt form of expression for this new generation, in contrast to the more overt gestures of angst created by Abstract Expressionists.

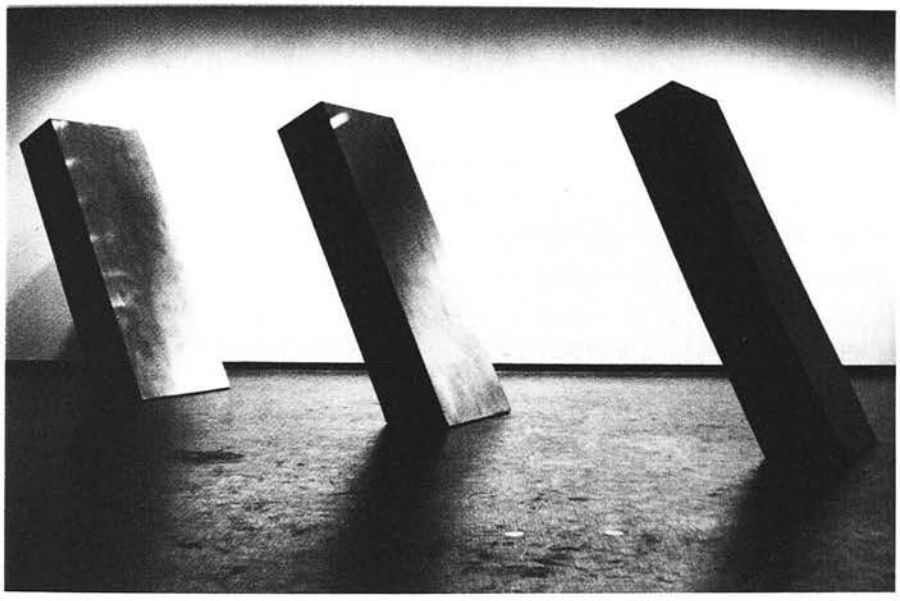

Fig. 4.10, Ronald Bladen, *Three Elements*, 1965, painted black steel and polished aluminium, each element: 9' 4" x 4' x 2', Jewish Museum, New York

In 1967, John Perreault extended this idea further. Not only was this sense of hollowness 'expressive', it was thought-provoking. He described Robert Morris approvingly as the 'genius of negative presence and [of] the perversity of odd proportions that are subliminal in their aggressiveness.'[59] Morris and Donald Judd made works that called attention to themselves in their quietude, he claimed. 'In this age of bombast, chatter, and random activity, that which does not move and that which is silent is often that which compels

[58] Barbara Rose, 'ABC Art,' *Art in America*, (October – November, 1965), repr., Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 281-2

[59] John Perreault, 'No-one has clearly pointed out...' in *Village Voice*, (January 12, 1967), repr. as 'Minimal Abstracts', Battock, *Minimal Art*, 259

our attention and stimulates our awareness most effectively.'[60] Perreault also noted that Ronald Bladen's 'concern with balance and the aggressiveness of his works' might link him, 'at least tentatively,' with Judd and Morris (fig 4.10). Bladen's looming works 'have "insides,"' Perreault explains, 'They have a secret. They provoke our curiosity and yet, because they also provoke our fear they ignite our awareness by forcing us to consider their interiors and to consider what their smooth geometry makes invisible.'[61] Here, the 'gaps' in the grid came into view, not because 'order' has been discombobulated or suspended, as in Borges's encyclopedia,[62] but because one sensed, with trepidation, something invisible lurking in the interstices of the ordered visible. Perreault attributed this form of consciousness-raising to the 'Duchamp, neo-Dada, Cage tradition,'[63] a tradition which Morris embraced, although Judd did not. It was also related, I would argue, to the uncanny dimension of *ostranenie*.

Greenberg and Fried, on the other hand, condemned such effects as dissembling and insidious. Fried's famous 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood,' is worth analysing in some detail as it was to become an important reference point for both supporters and critics of 'minimalism' – or 'literalism' as Fried called it. In his essay Fried outlined the ways in which literalism ran counter to (his own) 'modernist' priorities; he contrasted the alienating effect of literalist 'theatricality' with the serene sensation of modernist 'presentness'. In spite of the fact that Fried's observations were more pertinent to some works than others, (Judd objected to Fried's approach in 1969, complaining that 'he cross-referenced Bob Morris, Tony Smith and myself and argued against the mess.'[64]), even for people who disagreed with Fried's value judgements, his characterisation of literalism served to crystallise the challenge it posed to modernism. Indeed, Meyer has claimed that Fried's characterisation of literalism 'more or less invented "minimalism" for later critics.'[65]

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 259-60
[62] See chapter 3
[63] John Perreault, 'Minimal Abstracts,' 259
[64] Judd,' Complaints: part I,' 198
[65] Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 229

Fried argued that although Judd et al saw fit to condemn the 'anthropomorphism' of modernist sculpture (in which as Judd put it, 'a beam thrusts, a piece of iron follows a gesture'[66]), minimalism was itself anthropomorphic in the way it crowded out the viewer.[67] He wrote,

> ...the experience of being distanced by the work in question seems crucial: the beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended - and unexacting - relation *as subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor. In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another *person*; the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly – for example, in somewhat darkened rooms – can be strongly, if momentarily, disquieting in just this way.[68]

As far as Fried was concerned, the 'hiddenness' of this kind of anthropomorphism was 'incurably theatrical;'[69] that is, it compounded one's sense of alienation.

> The apparent hollowness of most literalist work – the quality of having an *inside* – is almost blatantly anthropomorphic. It is, as numerous commentators have remarked approvingly, as though the work in question has an inner, even secret, life...[70]

Numerous commentators (Rose and Perrault among them) seemed to commend this hidden anthropomorphism, but to Fried, it was problematic. From his point of view, any form of cultural practice that increased, rather than suspended, the self-consciousness of the viewer was best avoided. As we have seen, Morris thought that a beholder's contemplation of a total situation, which also incorporated him or her self, was an opportunity for increased reflection and understanding. From Fried's perspective however, this simply opened the floodgates to the indiscriminate and unending flood of reality, and thus had the opposite effect.

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[66] Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', 183. See n.5 of this chapter
[67] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, June 1967, repr. Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art*, 119, citing Judd, (no ref)
[68] Ibid., 128
[69] Ibid., 130
[70] Ibid., 129

> It is, I think, worth remarking that the 'entire situation' means exactly that: *all* of it – including, it seems, the beholder's *body*. There is nothing within his field of vision [...] that, as it were, declares its irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience in question. On the contrary, for something to be perceived at all is for it to be perceived as part of that situation. Everything counts – not as part of the object, but as part of the situation in which its objecthood is established and on which that objecthood partly depends.'[71]

He bemoaned the 'endlessness' and 'inexhaustibility' of literalist works – for Fried, an encounter with a literalist object was a mere re-staging of everyday encounters with non-art objects.

> [...] Like the shape of the object, the materials do not represent, signify or allude to anything; they are what they are and nothing more. [...] Like Judd's Specific Objects and Morris's gestalt or unitary forms, [Tony] Smith's cube is always of further interest; one never feels that one has come to the end of it; it is inexhaustible. It is inexhaustible, not because of any fullness – *that* is the inexhaustibility of art – but because there is nothing to exhaust. It is endless... In fact, it seems to be the experience that most deeply excites literalist sensibility, and that literalist artists seek to objectify in their work – for example, by the repetition of identical units (Judd's 'one thing after another'), which carries the implication that the units in question could be multiplied *ad infinitum*.[72]

In literalist works, then, 'the beholder is made aware of the endlessness and inexhaustibility if not of the object then at least of his experience of it,' whereas Fried preferred work that '*has no* duration'. Duration was suspended in such work (see fig. 4.11) 'not because one in fact experiences a picture by Noland or Olitski or a sculpture by David Smith or Caro in no time at all, but because *at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest*.' [73] He thus contrasted literalist 'presence' with modernist 'presentness,' arguing that 'presentness is grace.'[74]

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[71] Ibid., 127
[72] Ibid.,.143-4
[73] Ibid., 145
[74] Ibid., 147

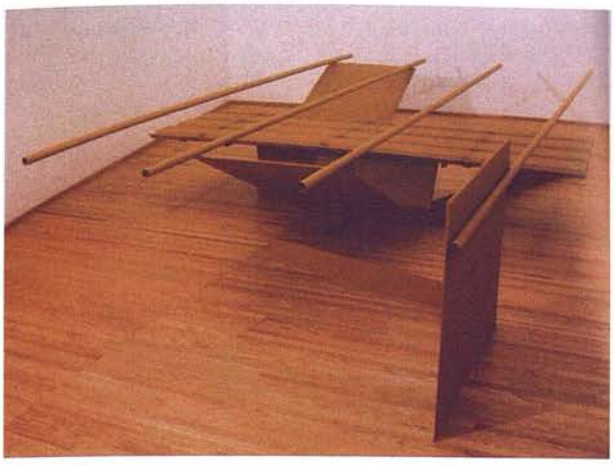

Fig. 4.11, Antony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967, steel matt painted yellow, 96 x 582 x 320 cm, Private collection. Photograph courtesy Barford Sculptures

Why did Fried consider 'duration' to be an artistic weakness, and its suspension a strength? What was wrong with being self-conscious in relation to an artistic object? Fried's advocacy of works that enabled a *self-forgetting* form of contemplation signals an allegiance to the 18th and 19th century roots of modernist aesthetic theories in Kant (1724-1804) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Schopenhauer's pessimistic view was that humans were entirely driven, and inescapably oppressed, by 'will': a senseless, irrational force which, because it had no unity of purpose, brought humans into remorseless and futile conflict with each other. One of the only ways to extricate oneself from the flow of 'will' was through the 'disinterested' contemplation of an aesthetic object (to use Kant's term). Only then would one attain understanding: Schopenhauer argued that 'the consciousness of other things, or knowledge of perception, becomes the more perfect, in other words the more objective, the less conscious of ourselves we are during it.'[75]

> As all suffering proceeds from the will that constitutes the real self, all possibility of suffering is abolished simultaneously with the withdrawal of this side of consciousness. In this way, the state of pure objectivity of perception becomes one that makes us feel positively happy [...] On the other hand, as soon as the consciousness of one's own self, and thus subjectivity, i.e. the will, again obtains the ascendancy, a degree of discomfort and disquiet appears in keeping therewith; of discomfort in so far as corporeality (the organism that in itself it will) again makes itself felt; of disquiet, in so far as the will, on the intellectual path, again fills our consciousness with desires, emotions, passions, and cares. For the will,

[75] Arthur Schopenahuer, *The World as Will and Representation*, repr. Wilkinson, *Theories of Art*, 218

> as the principle of subjectivity, is everywhere the opposite, indeed, the antagonist, of knowledge.[76]

Not only would one be happier in these moments (absorbed in contemplation of an aesthetic object), one would be more enlightened. Being immersed in will constituted, for Schopenhauer, a state of ignorance. Rising above it, however momentarily, afforded a critical, i.e. disinterested perspective. Fried seemed to equate the flow of time with the flow of 'will.' Allowing duration to seep into our considerations of art also opened the way for our everyday desires and cares to return, too. Thus, Fried echoed the old idea that self-consciousness was an unwelcome distraction in the contemplation of art.

Furthermore, the effect of negative presence in literalism was not neutral – it actually felt oppressive. Referring to Tony Smith's account of a night-ride in the early 1950s on the unfinished Jersey Turnpike, Fried argued that

> It is the explicitness, that is to say, the sheer persistence, with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject – makes him subject – and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood.[77]

Smith (1912-1980) had been struck by the fact 'There's no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it,' and this insight had liberated Smith from his views about what art might be. But Fried was concerned about the discomfiture of being 'made subject' in such a situation, which he considered a 'literalist' situation. He later articulated his anxieties about this 'destabilising psychodynamic' more specifically:

> My critique of the literalist address to the viewer's body was [...] that literalism theatricalised the body, put it endlessly on stage, made it uncanny or opaque to itself, hollowed it out, deadened its expressiveness, denied its finitude and in a sense its humaneness and so on.[78]

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[76] Ibid., 219
[77] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 134-5
[78] Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, (Chicago and London: 1998), 42

Fried's transposition of the term hollow from the object to its viewer was remarkably telling. It was not only the literalist object that came across as hollow and secret. The viewer's own body also began to feel hollow, opaque and uncanny to itself. Fried offered a powerful characterisation of the psychic split that occurs when one becomes self-conscious. Alienated from one's own body, it comes to seem hollowed out and over-extended at the same time.

Encountering a literalist object meant, it seemed to Fried, a failure in the suspension of disbelief. According to Potts, this was the effect that underpinned Fried equation of literalism and theatricality (that is, 'bad' theatre):[79]

> Fried's obsession with theatricality betrays an acute awareness of how the illusion created by an art object, the sense that something more is there than the literal facts of its existence, is constantly in danger of collapse, particularly with sculpture. The work becomes mere theatre – theatricality intrudes – once a viewer becomes uneasy in the awareness that he or she has been taken in by such an illusion after it ceases to be convincing.[80]

To avoid such a 'collapse' back into real world facts – and Fried saw this as a consistent challenge for artists – the work of art needed to command 'conviction', particularly in relation to art of the past.[81] The banal theatre of everyday objects could only be avoided if the object accessed a 'pictorial' as well as 'literal' dimension according to Fried. It has to 'defeat or suspend its own objecthood, [...] the crucial factor in this undertaking is shape, but shape [...] must be pictorial, not, or not merely, literal.'[82] Potts took this to mean that a work of art needed to present itself 'incontrovertibly both as real object and as momentary illusion, rather than as mere object or mere illusion – like the actor who manages to come across as a real person successfully playing the part of a fictive

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[79] In their sections on 'Art and Objecthood', both Potts and Meyer discuss at length the importance of Fried's conversations with Stanley Cavell in formulating his idea of 'theatre', which had had no previous currency in visual art circles. See Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 229-43, and Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 188-99

[80] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 189

[81] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 142

[82] Ibid.

character.'[83] Fried recognised, however, that such moments of fusion between real and illusion were rare. Indeed, he prized them all the more for their elusiveness.

Fried's concern about the lack of aesthetic 'integrity' of minimalist objects, and his wishful call for the preservation of 'distance' and grace, sounded anachronistic to most 1960s practitioners, and it seems even more so today. From a twenty-first century perspective, Potts argued, 'the controversial affect of Minimalist work has now petered out,' and the intensity of Fried's original objections seems curious 'because the unframing that disturbed him is no longer an issue for viewers habituated to being incorporated within the spaces defined by three-dimensional work.' (Even by the mid 1970s, sculptural environments, conceptual art installations and live performance had come to dominate exhibitions in London and New York, attesting to the widespread application of 1960s models). Nor are today's audiences, Potts continued, particularly worried by attempts 'formally to negate or frustrate accepted conceptions of what a work of art should be.'[84] Yet something about Fried's psychic anxiety lingers on. How aggressively a work is felt to intrude on one's space may now be perceived as 'really a matter of individual sensibility and psychic susceptibility,'[85] and not a question about how art works *ought* to behave, and yet, certain conditions that invested this debate with urgency in the 1960s still obtain. I am referring to the conditions of 'spectacle.'

I will ask in the next chapter if the anti-illusionism debate was so fraught because, in the end, it involved more than choosing whether to eliminate, or develop, the old 'pictorial' mode. Artists also had to contend with the ongoing transformation of pictorial values in the wider culture, and the emergence of a new perceived threat. Attempts by artists to move away from the detached subject position entailed by 'illusionism' towards a more knowing immersion in the world of relations, coincided with the emergence in the late 1960s of new anxieties about 'spectacle'. A disjunctive relation between the illusionistic picture and one's real environment was to become less of a worry in the 1980s when the environment was *itself* being transformed into a picture. I show in the next chapter how,

[83] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 189
[84] Ibid., 194
[85] Ibid., 195

for a group of French theorists who came of age during World War 2 and its aftermath - namely, Debord (1931-1994), Baudrillard (1929-2007), Virilio (b. 1932), all exact contemporaries of Judd and Morris - the 'spectacle' represented a new, more pernicious kind of immersion. These writers worried that such immersion eliminated any ground for critical reflection at all. In other words, the specific concerns that Fried expressed about theatricality in art were writ large in philosophical discussions that were to come in the 1980s.

I doubt very much that in the 1960s or early 1970s Judd or Morris or their commentators would have thought (yet) in terms of spectacle, at least in relation to sculpture. But what is becoming clear is that anti-illusionism was partly about finding the most effective way of being simultaneously inside and outside the experience of an artwork. In the 1960s and 1970s, this meant actively negotiating a middle ground between outmoded Cartesian detachment and the new mode of spectacular immersion. One of the reasons that works by Judd and Morris are so interesting today is that the difficult and urgent negotiation of these opposing 'dangers' is now evident. Did the problematic incorporation of illusion/spectacle in Judd's and Morris's works communicate this to contemporary audiences? I want to return now to a more detailed discussion of the optical effects – the supposed illusions – of Judd and Morris. Judd's perspicuous objects and Morris's space-shaping sculptures might be regarded as powerful because they revealed the contours of an immersive perceptual field while preventing the viewer from disappearing into it. What are the indications that critics saw their practices in this way?

Fraudulent space and slippery Plexiglas

First, we need to know how Judd and Morris approached the question of covert illusionism in their work. As I show now, these artists' investments in particular critical positions (necessarily crafted according to the terms of the current polemic), made it difficult for them to recognise, let alone discuss, illusion and spectacle in their own practice.

As a first line of defence, Judd and Morris both insisted that there was a distinction between painterly illusion - with its 'duality' of material and image - and the objective 'optical illusions' that occurred in the real world. Morris pointed out in 1967 that disjunctions in vision are not attributable to different 'realms', but to differentiations in a single realm:

> We have no interpretation of the totality of the object other than what has been constructed from incidental views under various conditions. Yet the process of 'building' the object from immediate sense data is homogeneous: there is no point in the process where any conditions of light or perspective indicate a realm of existence different from that indicated by other views under other conditions.[86]

In the same year, when Rose put it to Judd that there were illusionistic elements in his work, Judd made a similar distinction:

> All I can say is that [the works] don't seem illusionistic in that sense to me. You are bound to have a certain amount of reflection, and you are changing position when you look at a three-dimensional thing. In a sense that is illusion just in the technical meaning of the term. I distinguish between that, and illusion which I think is a perfectly matter of fact illusion and has no connection to the other kind.[87]

Both artists' statements were convincing in terms of logic, and it is entirely possible to dismiss accounts of covert illusionism and anthropomorphism as semantic misunderstanding. Yet, as we know, the debate about illusionism was not about technicalities alone. Were Judd and Morris genuinely uninterested in the question, or did they encounter difficulties in addressing it openly?

On one occasion, in the early 1970s, Rose asked Judd, 'People have said that your work has a degree of illusionism... Is that a problem?' Judd replied simply, 'I generally don't think about it.'[88] In another interview in 1971 with Coplans, he also denied that the

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[86] Morris, 'Notes, Part 3,' 23

[87] Rose, *A New Aesthetic*, 43, cited by Colpitt, 'Minimal Art,' 106

[88] Judd in an undated interview, Barbara Rose Papers, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles, Roll 2, 2-3, cited by Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 138, n 84, who noted that the interview 'probably dates to 1971-2.'

shadows his objects cast had any significance. 'All my pieces are meant to be seen in even or natural light. The shadows are unimportant, they are just a by-product.'[89] He blamed museum lighting for the shadows – the Whitney's spotlights being 'especially bad.'[90] Judd avoided discussing his materials in terms of reflection or of illusion, but in the same interview, he expressed contradictory feelings about Plexiglas, which he had been using since 1965. On the one hand, Judd claimed that he used Plexiglas in order to give 'access to the interior' of the work. 'The use of plexiglass exposes the interior, so the volume is opened up... It's fairly logical to open it up so that the interior can be viewed. It makes it less mysterious, less ambiguous.'[91] As an extension of this frankness, he said, he often omitted the bottom side of the box:

> None of the plexiglass boxes has a bottom, thus in the clear ones the floor can be seen through the box. This opens the box up. The whole scheme has to do with defined ends and open body; this has been a sort of steady idea.[92]

In Judd's own terms he sought to frame and reserve space as much as contain it. Plexiglas does not simply allow access to the interior, however, nor direct our attention to the normal operations of light and space around the object. It also distorts light and dematerialises space in surprising ways. Judd himself admitted, 'I have very ambivalent feelings about plexiglass and don't like it too much as a material. In part it's a sort of slippery and slightly disagreeable material.'[93]

Morris, meanwhile, very rarely mentioned reflective surfaces in his litany of 'intimacy-producing' relations in *Notes on Sculpture*, even though, in terms of the critique he had set, such surfaces ought to have been considered as problematic as translucent surfaces: reflective surfaces, as much as translucent ones, incorporated part of their surroundings, and showed simultaneous views at once.[94] Had Morris criticised reflection specifically, he would have condemned his own set of mirrored cubes from 1965 (fig. 4.7). Perhaps

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[89] Coplans, 'Don Judd: Interview,' 41
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 36
[92] Ibid., 41
[93] Ibid., 44
[94] See above, 121 for his critique of the 'cubist' aesthetic.

he hoped to deflect attention away from this potential incongruity by concentrating his disapproval on translucency. The tension remained visible anyway - Rose found the cubes 'so elusive they appeared literally transparent.'[95]

In fact, Morris admitted in 1979, he had 'begrudged' the appearance of mirrors in his work.

> The mirror, that most insubstantial of surfaces, has appeared periodically in my work for some 17 years. At first I begrudged its appearance, attempted to suppress it, then ended by accepting it. In the beginning I was ambivalent about its fraudulent space, its blatant illusionism.[96]

It is striking that Morris spoke about mirrored surfaces as if he had not been responsible for their inclusion. It was as if the mirrors had haunted him, 'appearing' in the work whether he liked it or not. The reason for his ambivalence towards them was clear to him in hindsight: his re-use of polemical terms like 'fraudulent space' and 'blatant illusionism,' suggested that he saw the problematic of reflection squarely in relation to the prevailing anti-illusionist discourse of the 1960s, which he had helped to frame. In contrast, his subsequent conversion to mirrors was phrased in rather different language. 'Later,' he said, the mirror's 'very suspiciousness seemed a virtue. I came to like its hovering connotation of abject narcissism, its reek of the cheaply decorative, its status as a kind of disco-degenerate category.'[97] The polemical terrain had shifted to such a degree by the late 1970s that Morris could now express freer, more allusive ideas in relation to reflection, which were a long way from the dogmatic tone of 'Notes on Sculpture'.

Both artists, then, continued to use materials in the 1960s regardless of the deep ambivalence they provoked. Why? What value did these materials offer that might counter their users' instinctive distaste? In spite of a reluctance on the part of the artists to talk about it, critics continued to wonder about 'inconsistencies' between anti-

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[95] Barbara Rose, 'ABC Art,' 289
[96] Robert Morris, *Mirror Works 1961-78*, exh. cat., (New York, Leo Castelli: 1979), no page ref.
[97] Ibid.

illusionist discourse and the apparent illusions in certain artworks. As we have seen, for example, both sympathetic and hostile critics described strong sensations of uncanny presence. It was as if expelling illusion had, like an exorcism, conjured it into being as a spectre. The second part of my survey of critical articles focuses on what critics made of this spectre of illusion. Did they feel it compromised the works' success?

Critics' speculation

Krauss was one of the first critics to investigate the contrast between Judd's discursive framing and his works. In her now famous 1966 article for *Artforum*, she claimed that Judd's promotion of the 'object in its own right' seemed to 'proscribe both allusion and illusion' so that, 'any reference to experiences or ideas beyond the work's brute physical presence is excluded, as is any manipulation [...] of apparent as opposed to literal space.'[98] She continued,

> With this presumptive reduction of art from the realm of illusion – and through illusionism, meaning – to the sphere of transparently real objects, the art with which Judd is associated is characterized as intentionally blank and empty: 'Obviously a negative art of denial and renunciation...'//

But, she argued,

> Approaching Judd's work from this frame of reference, one is totally unprepared for the extraordinary beauty of the sculptures themselves, a beauty and authority that is nowhere described or accounted for in the polemics of object-art and which leads one to feel all the more acutely the inadequacy of the theoretical line, its failure to measure up (at least in Judd's case) to the power of the sculptural statement.[99]

In contrast to Morris, Krauss does not criticise Judd's work for the way it gratified 'immediate sensuous confrontation.'[100] Rather, she regarded this as a strength: such 'richness and plenitude' exceeded the claims made for the object (while nevertheless being grounded in the object). It was 'insistently meaningful.'[101] Rose had reported that artists such as Judd and Morris 'ask that their sculpture be taken as "nothing more than

[98] Krauss 'Allusion and Illusion,' 24
[99] Ibid., 24
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

the total of the series of assertions that it is this or that shape and takes up so much space and is painted such a color and made of such a material.'"[102] But for Krauss, the strength of Judd's sculptures derived from the fact that 'grasping the works by means of a list of their physical properties, no matter how complete, is both possible and impossible.'[103] This presentation of a conundrum recalled Smithson's comments about the structure and the surface of Judd's works discussed in the last chapter – the structure was there for all to see, and yet it seemed at times to disappear. There were palpable 'facts' but no 'substance' at the 'core' of them.[104] As we have seen, Rose made her own qualification about her uncanny impression that these works were 'masquerading' as objects,[105] but Krauss did not mention this. Krauss was less interested in uncanny presence than she was in, in Smithson's words, 'uncanny materiality'.[106]

Judd's subversion of visual expectations, in particular, gave the objects a quality of strangeness. She detailed the surprising reversals of understanding that took place as she explored one of Judd's progressions, shown at Castelli Gallery (figs. 4.12 and 4.13).

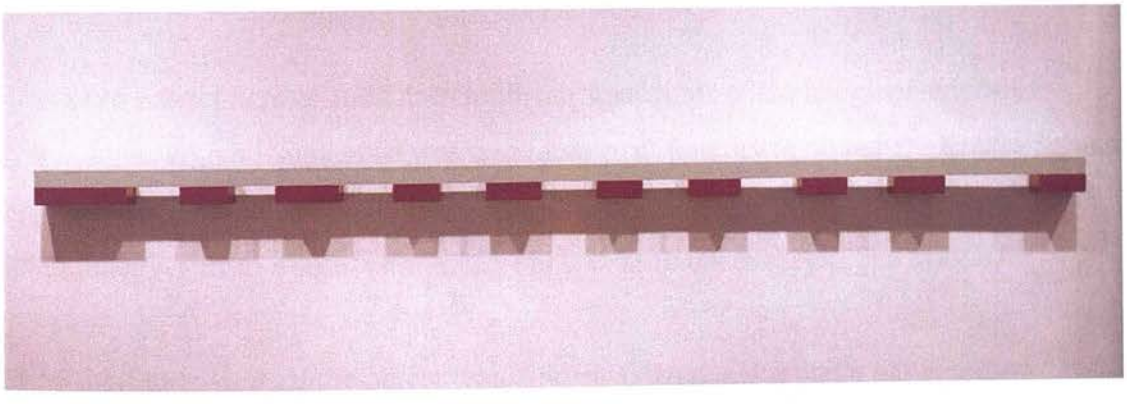

Fig. 4.12 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1965, aluminium and purple lacquer on aluminium 21 x 642.6 x 21 cm (8 1/4" x 253" x 8"), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman foundation, Inc.

[102] Ibid., 24, citing Rose, 'ABC Art,' no page ref.
[103] Ibid.,
[104] See above, 97
[105] Rose, 'ABC Art,' 281-2. See above, 130
[106] Smithson, 'Donald Judd,' 6. See above, 97

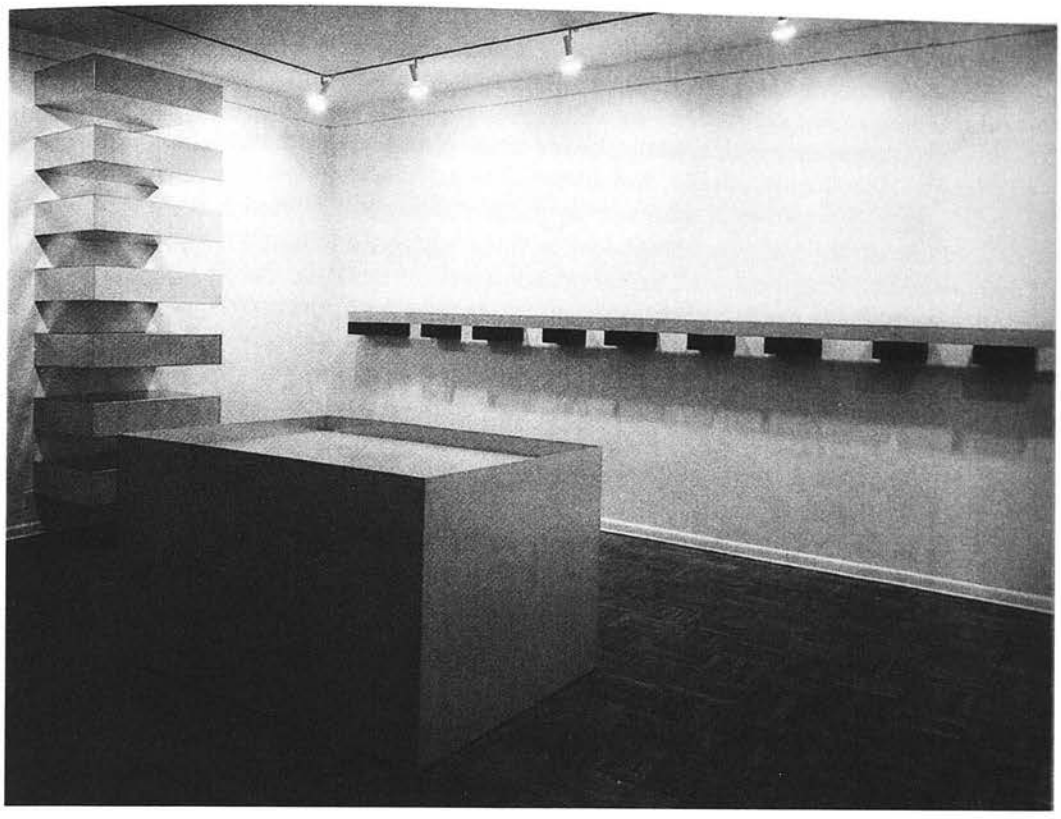

Fig. 4.13 Donald Judd, one-person show at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1966; estate of Donald Judd

There are echoes here of Judd and Smithson's accounts of the hanging/supporting conundrum, which I suggested was an example of 'polarity in alliance.' Krauss focussed on this effect as it unfolded in time - as a kind of discovery. Her initial reading of purple boxes hanging from a solid aluminium bar was soon contradicted, she said, by

> the side view of the object which reveals that the aluminum bar is hollow (and open at both ends) while the purple boxes below it, which had appeared luminous and relatively weightless, are in fact enclosed, and furthermore function as the supports for the continuous aluminum member. It is they that are attached to the wall and into which the square profile of the aluminium bar fits (flush with their top and sides) completing their own L-shaped profile to form an eight by eight-inch box in section.[107]

For Krauss, this constituted a kind of deception in the work: 'The earlier sense of the purple bars' impalpability and luminosity is reversed and a clearer perception of the work

[107] Krauss 'Allusion and Illusion,' 25

can be obtained; but it is still one that is startlingly adumbrated and misleading.'[108] The previous view was, she concluded, 'in some way an illusion.'[109] In chapter 8, I propose a new reading of Judd's work that is based on this important, but little remarked, effect, which I relate to the cinematic techniques of focus pulling and framing. For now, I want to consider this point in relation to the polemics of illusionism.

Was this 'illusion' related to illusionism for Krauss? Did the work occupy, or generate, 'apparent' space? In fact, Krauss argued that 'apparent' space was not excluded, but brought into tension with 'literal' space. Such a structure demanded 'to be seen in perspective,' she explained, yet because of the 'obviously unequal lengths of the violet bars and the unequal distances which separate[d] them,' it confounded a perspectival reading. She elaborated further, quoting Merleau-Ponty:

> The work cannot be seen rationally, in terms of a given sense of geometrical laws or theorems evolved prior to the experience of the object. Instead, the sculpture can be sensed only in terms of its present coming into being as an object given "in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real."[110]

Krauss suggested that in the specific object, there was a 'heightening of illusion' - 'not of pictorial illusion, but of lived illusion.'[111] For Krauss, lived illusion was an encounter with the 'real.' It blocked the intellectual reduction of the object to a fixed and finite entity. She explained,

> The 'lived perspective' of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is very different from the rational perspective of geometrical laws. 'What prohibits me from treating my perception as an intellectual act would grasp the object either as possible or as necessary. But in perception it is 'real,' it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively.'[112]

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Krauss 'Allusion and Illusion,' 25, citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty,' Cezanne's Doubt', no ref given.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid,, citing Merleau-Ponty, 'The Primacy of Perception,' 1964, no ref. given.

Perhaps because of her sympathy to Greenbergian ideas, (she cited Greenberg and Fried in the article), Krauss could address the question of illusion with more equanimity than Judd or Morris. It was still possible in 1966 to reconcile an enthusiasm for Judd's work and an allegiance to Fried, because 'Art and Objecthood' had yet to be published. [113] Thus, at this stage in her career, Krauss associated Judd's 'increased sensuosity' and his so-called illusionism with 'meaningfulness,'[114] suggesting that the sculpture 'becomes [...] an irritant for, and a heightening of, the awareness in the viewer that he approaches objects to make meaning of them.'[115] This was a statement supporting the idea that meta-awareness was illuminating, and thus desirable, (rather than alienating, as Fried was to claim a year later). Krauss was suggesting that, far from hindering such awareness, as anti-illusionists might claim, the inclusion of apparent space (or more specifically, the inclusion of apparent space *in tension with* literal space) served to bring to light the viewer's expectations in approaching the object.

As I discuss in detail in the next chapter, Krauss had a dramatic change of heart about Judd in hindsight, the terms of which are very revealing. In a 1994 roundtable discussion, organised by *October*, she condemned Judd's 'pictorial' values as 'academic' (that is to say, irrelevant).[116] Gone were her original distinctions between 'pictorial illusion' and 'lived illusion' – she now condemned the technique of 'projecting the illusion inside the object' which, for her, 'characterized Judd and Flavin.'

> I would say: 'pictorial makes academic.' That's my motto. The untransformed notions of pictoriality, the sneaking back of fundamental values that pictoriality enables, like autonomy and the possibility of excluding everything outside itself – including the body – 'makes academic.'[117]

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[113] In fact, as Meyer illustrates, Krauss broke with Fried over Art and Objecthood: 'an assimilation of structuralist, post-structuralist, and phenomenological principles motivated a rejection of Fried's model of presentness.' Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 239

[114] Krauss 'Allusion and Illusion,' 24 and 26

[115] Ibid., 26

[116] Krauss et al, 'The Reception of the Sixties,' *October*, 69, (Summer 1994), 11. See below, 159-63 for an extended consideration of this discussion.

[117] Ibid., 10

Benjamin Buchloh, another participant, protested that Fried had criticised 'minimalism' precisely on the basis that 'Judd and others depictorialized, that Judd and others phenomenologized, that Judd and others established a new mode of interaction with the sculptural object that was previously excluded from the pictorial operations of modernism.'[118] Now, ironically, Krauss dismissed Fried's criticism of Judd, not in order to rehabilitate him, but to condemn him.

> If Michael Fried wrote that article in 1967, I wrote one in *Artforum* in 1965, called 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,' in which I talked about his work as supremely illusionistic and involved in pictorialist reflections, in all the things Smithson would later call 'uncanny materiality' because of the doubling caused by such reflections.'[119]

She stood by her earlier analysis of how Judd's works operated, but changed her opinion of their value. 'Judd's number as a crypto-painter got called very early on,' she added.[120]

In fact, Krauss's memory was inaccurate. There was not a single mention of reflections in her article (which was published in 1966, not 1965 as she claimed), and none in Smithson's 1965 essay about Judd (published prior, in fact, to Krauss's analysis). What was behind her change of heart regarding the value of Judd's work? Why did she remember reflections that she had not seen at the time? In contrast to the thoughtful and detailed reading of Judd in her Artforum article, Krauss's contribution to the later discussion was general and polemical. She wanted to make an unfavourable distinction between Morris and LeWitt on the one hand, and 'covert painters' like Judd and Flavin on the other, and to that end, she resorted to the old terms of anti-illusionism, now hardened in history (and indeed, as we shall see, rather puzzling to the younger participants in the discussion). Evidently, at some point, reflections had come into view as a predominant part of the 'illusionism' attributed to Judd, but in 1965-6, the two most insightful critics to describe Judd's work had not noticed them. Reflections constituted a blind spot. It was only in the later part of the 1960s, in fact, that reflections began to

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[118] Ibid., 11
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.

appear in the commentary of other critics, as I now show, and even then, they were discussed as one of a number of factors which had a 'dematerialising' effect on the work. The 'doubling' effect that Krauss mentioned in 1994 was simply not addressed. (I will return to this idea of 'doubling' in chapter 8.)

'Ironic dematerialising'

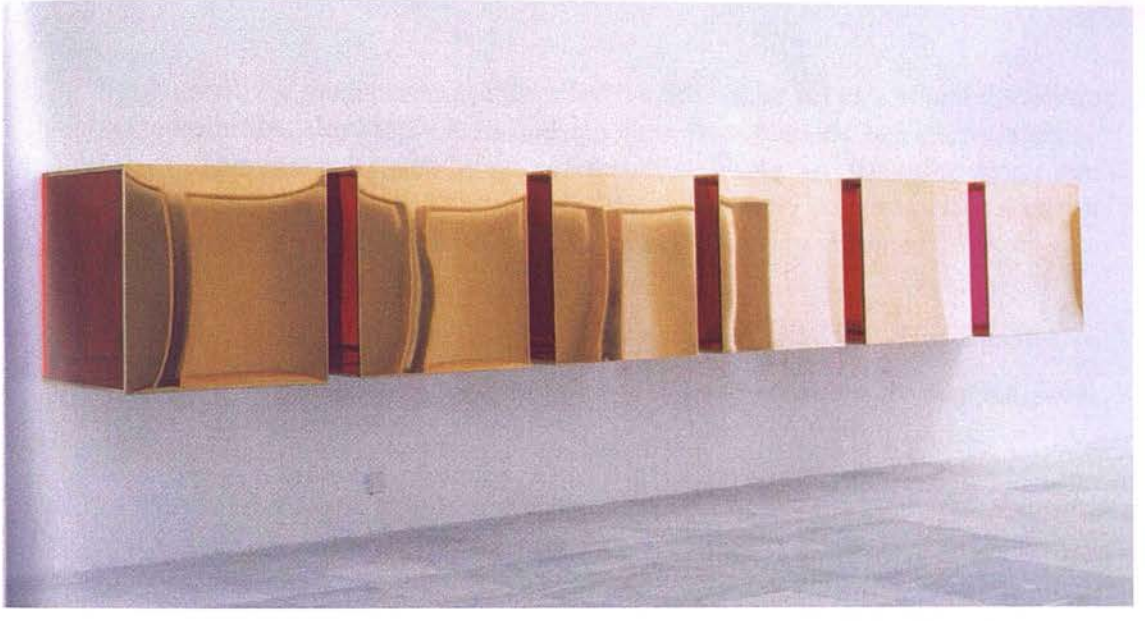

Fig. 4.14 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1972, Plexiglas and brass, Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation

In an article for Studio International in 1969, Reise criticised the 'current critical penchant for identifying styles, discovering movements, and defining labels.' In this context, the term 'Minimal Art' had become 'worse than useless, it had led to confusion' and 'somewhere the direct experience of works of art got lost in a plethora of words.'[121] Having said that, the writings of Andre, Flavin, Judd, LeWitt and Morris testified to their 'abundance of ideas' and sophistication. For Reise,

> Their work involves ontological questionings of matter, of relation between ideas and physical form, of 'art' as material object, space or place, or concept. One

[121] Barbara Reise, '"Untitled 1969": A Footnote on Art and Minimal Stylehood,' *Studio International*, vol. 177, no. 910 (April 1969), 166

> must *think* as well as perceive to get the full effects of their work, which unfolds over time in conceptual richness.[122]

What is interesting in Reise's discussion about Judd is that she attributes some of this 'conceptual richness' to his use of reflection. An 'ironic dematerialising' occurred in Judd's works, she argued. In a wall-piece with 'six equal cubic boxes' (a later version is shown in (fig 4.14), Reise referred to the effect of 'refracted' coloured light. Plexiglas sides, she said, enclose and create volumes, but

> light-sensitized transparency and reflective properties act as a visual dissolution of these volumes, allowing vision through them from the side and interrelating interior and exterior space by refracted coloured light. [At the same time,] the spatial intervals between the boxes are just sufficiently compressed to seem as tangible as the light-dissolved material of neighbouring volumes.[123]

In other words, voids appeared solid and solids were dematerialised. This was not deceptive illusionism, though, as these properties acted 'more optically than tangibly':

> ...with Judd's work, colour is inextricably part of physical light carried through real space from specific material – not presented through illusion in painting's material pigment. As such, Judd's colour and light are real properties of the material; their effect on a viewer is aggressively physical and thus, again ironically, sculptural.[124]

Transparency and reflectivity generated optical illusions that were 'aggressively' physical, according to Reise. These effects, like Krauss' 'lived illusion', startled the audience into taking a conceptual step back and exploring the ontology of sculpture.[125]

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 167
[124] Ibid., 168
[125] 'Difference in material is one way Judd explores the ontology of traditional plastic form: volume, space, mass, light, colour and surface are all examined in and of themselves as timeless artistic *concepts*.' That is, Reise thought Judd re-staged elements inherited from painting and sculpture in 'deeper more relative terms: surface relative to volume, volume relative to space and mass, space and mass relative to light and colour, line relative to plane and volume, part relative to whole.' In his boxes lined with plexiglas or highly polished metal, for instance, 'the sense of insideness (volume) vibrates against their exterior planar surface with marvellous richness.' Ibid., 166

This theme was also advanced by Michelson, writing in the same year, 1969; though in relation to Morris. For Michelson, the reflective effects of Morris's mirrored cubes (fig. 4.7) complicated the usual figure-ground relation in a productive way. Before Morris could bring himself to address his own use of reflections, Michelson characterised their effect as *conceptual*. 'Through a series of exploratory enterprises, [Morris offers] the terms of a sharpened definition of the nature of sculptural experience.'[126] For Michelson, Morris's work urged 'reflection on the present, concrete options of sculpture, as on the general terms and conditions of its perception.'[127] This was not simply a matter of simple gestalts, however. Referring to the mirrored cubes, which she had seen at the Green Gallery show in 1965,[128] Michelson wrote, 'To describe, to account for that which they presented a view, is to relate a contradiction; each object [in the group] was dissolved even as it was defined, through reflection.'[129] Understanding this visual contradiction, she suggested, took time.

> Somewhere in the oscillation between the terms of the contradiction, during the reflective movement of its apprehension, within the space of equivocation, a fact was posited, a form was located. Real cubes were described by the virtual, inaccessible, intangible space of their mirrored surfaces. Those surfaces, in describing forms, posited facts as problematic, elicited Reflection. The physical space of apperception was perceived as the mental space of a paradox, a location issuing in Speculation.[130]

The cubes provoked thoughts about real space and 'mental' space, and about the production of space by perceptual processes - it is not insignificant that Michelson chose the optically-derived terms 'Reflection' and 'Speculation'.

In 'traditional' aesthetics, she suggested, real and virtual realms were allotted to the spectator and the work respectively. Michelson argued that Morris deliberately

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[126] Annette Michelson, 'Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression', *Robert Morris*, (Washington DC: Corcoran Art Gallery, 1969) repr., James Meyer, ed., *Minimalism*, (new Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 248
[127] Ibid.
[128] See fig 4.7, 123
[129] Michelson, 'Robert Morris', 248
[130] Ibid.

complicated this distinction by collapsing the two with a structure that 'visibly (virtually) absorbs the spectator.'[131]

> The space absorbed, reflected by the mirrored cubes, is that of the gallery in which we now stand, perceiving ourselves as standing – and as perceiving. In these instances, then, the central focus of attention is the manner of the solicitation – through placing scale, unity of shape, volume, the nature of the materials and of the spectator's sensed relationship of the self as perceiving, corporeal presence, to the object in question: the sense of co-presence.[132]

Alongside the optical conundrum, Michelson re-introduced the theme of negative presence. The viewer's attention was drawn to the way the object solicited them, and to the way they received that solicitation. This staged 'co-presence' was thus, in Michelson's view, an important aspect of Morris's conceptual strategy.

This judgement, of course, ran counter to Fried's condemnation of 'presence' in 1967. As Meyer argued in 2001, Michelson's essay was a 'powerful reversal of "Art and Objecthood"'s cherished values.'[133] It was, in fact, instrumental in the hardening of the polemic, as the two sides – 'Art and Objecthood' and 'minimalism as theater' – came to 'compose a field of opposition, a before and after: a central divide in the aesthetic debates of the sixties.'[134] Meyer argued, however, that condemning Fried's notion of presentness as 'a retrograde moralism and outmoded ontology,' and equating it with 'the metaphysical self-presence targeted by the writings of Derrida,'[135] actually reduced the complexity of Fried's idea (much as Fried had reduced the 'heterogeneity of "minimalism"'). According to Meyer,

> Logocentrism, for Derrida, is a congruence of speech and intention, a transparency of immediate thought and utterance. Presentness in Fried's sense is a less confident notion. Not self-presence, but a desire for presentness, it is the momentary plenitude of one who is not whole; a subject who is opaque to himself

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid. 248
[133] Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 239
[134] Ibid., 243
[135] Ibid., 240

> and others; a self who attempts to communicate in a world where language invariably misfires.[136]

As described by Krauss, Reise and Michelson, Judd and Morris's 'objects' were seen in tandem with the 'illusions' that they generated. On paper this might satisfy Fried's plea that real object and momentary illusion should be perceived together – indeed, this sounds remarkably like an example of Judd's polarity and alliance: two unalike things seen in conjunction. The difference was that in Fried's modernism, the object and illusion were successfully, if only momentarily, mapped onto each other, allowing a brief suspension in the play of relations between them, and in the sense of self-consciousness that attended their observation. Whereas, in many of Judd's works and in Morris's mirrored cubes, the object and illusion were brought into tension – their polarity was accentuated, not concealed. In these instances, the object emerged as haunted, alienated. Both parties asserted as much. What was disputed was which of these scenarios was preferable. For Fried, the momentary suspension of alienation, if it could be achieved, was valuable. For Krauss, Reise and Michelson, being confronted with one's desire for presentness was more important than achieving it. Indeed, indulging one's desire to lose oneself in pictures or sensuous details was evidently frowned upon by these writers, in the same way that traditional criticism was: neither, they felt, were sufficiently 'analytical'.[137]

Robert Pincus-Witten explored the parameters of this position in a review of Judd's exhibition at Castelli Warehouse in May 1970 (fig. 4.15). 'One's critical opinions about recent American sculpture are almost entirely divorced from issues of pleasure and likeability,' he argued, 'though some of the artists are more immediately sensuous in their appeals than others.' Pleasure and its variants, it seems, were increasingly perceived as inimical to serious art. Asserting that Judd's importance arose from his 'unswerving commitment to difficulty,' Pincus-Witten was nevertheless concerned that his 'continued

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[136] Ibid.
[137] See chapter 2

feeling for lyrical color, *matières nobles*, and tinted plastics' might subvert this importance.[138]

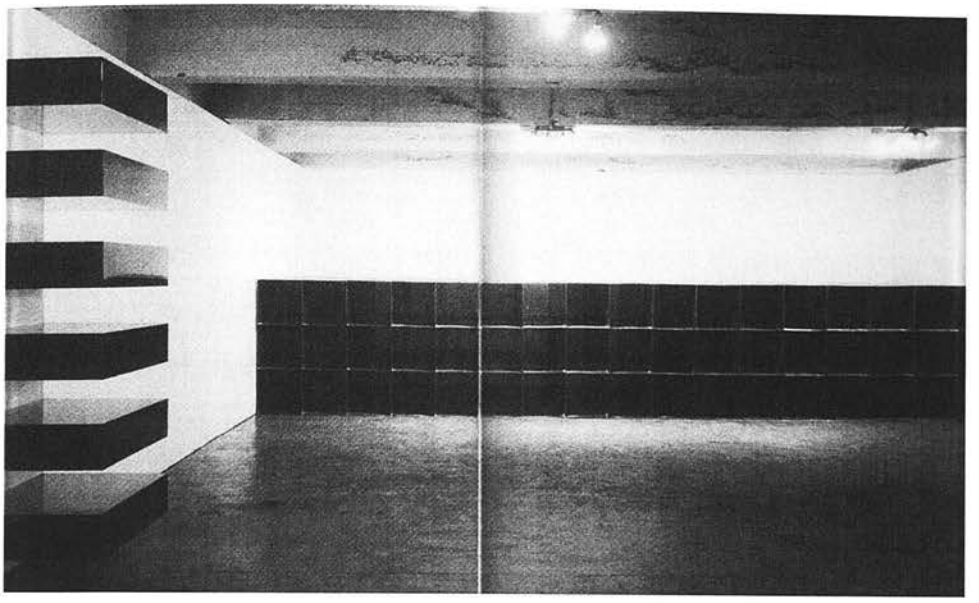

Fig. 4.15 Donald Judd, one-person show at Leo Castelli Gallery and Warehouse, 1970

He attributed Judd's fascination with these substances to the 'pictorial excitement'[139] that they offered. Interestingly, he illustrated this point with a description of Judd's reflections that might just as easily have applied to Morris's mirrored cubes:

> Among the most complex problems caused by the use of polished brass is the apparent absence of solidity – the sense of liquidity – it induces. [...] There are [...] views in which the sides appear translucent rather than reflective, as if one saw the floor through the side, rather than reflected off it. Such illusions permit a massive form to exist in two spheres of being, in pictorial as well as in sculptural space.[140]

Having expressed the qualms of an anti-illusionist, Pincus-Witten, like Krauss and Reise, proceeded to mount a defence of the pictorial qualities of Judd's surfaces on the basis that they were designed to attract and frustrate at the same time: Judd's colourful but 'intransigeant [sic] barricades,' he said, engaged the spectator 'without in fact permitting

[138] Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Fining it Down: Judd at Castelli,' *Artforum*, vol 8, no 10, June 1970, p. 47
[139] Ibid., 48
[140] Ibid.

the participation to spend itself [...] Polished surfaces and glossy plastic linings [...] thwart the sensate body appeals they are making.'[141] Indeed, he argued, 'Judd has been particularly co-ercive of the spectator, forcing him into altered relationships with an elemental, at moments brutalist, formal vocabulary.[142] Any 'illusions' that arose, then, were not easily consumed. In Pincus-Witten's opinion, Judd's objects' coercion of their viewers saved them from decorative triviality and superficiality.

I want to conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of two lengthy articles from the first half of the 1970s, by Gregoire Müller and William C. Agee, which incorporated a longer view of Judd's work and his critical reception. In different ways, both articles seemed to speak for Judd. Although Müller acknowledged that he had not 'spoken about sculpture' with Judd,[143] nevertheless, the project in his 1973 essay 'Donald Judd: Ten Years,' was to characterise Judd's supposed illusionism with reference to his assertions about specificity. It is clear from Müller's essay that the anti-illusionist debate was still regarded as crucial in understanding Judd's work. Müller, though, contributed his own interpretation:

> [Judd] had to denounce the illusionism of traditional art forms, not to make a style out of literalism, but to open the possibility of new fields where illusion goes deeper, without negating the actual presence in space of the pieces.[144]

Like Krauss, Müller dedicated a great deal of time to explaining how Judd's works made 'illusion *believable*, so much so that it is no longer perceived as illusion.'[145] For him, Judd's specificity was his illusion: it constituted, and made visible to the viewer, the *excess*, the supplemental and special value that distinguished works of art from other objects:

> [Judd's] insistence on specificity is far from the negativism of systematic anti-illusionism, all of which is rooted in anti-art [...] Judd's is a request for the work

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[141] Ibid., 49
[142] Ibid., 48-9
[143] Gregoire Müller, 'Donald Judd: Ten Years', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 47, no. 4, (February 1973), 38
[144] Ibid., 35
[145] Ibid.

> to exist, not 'merely' as one thing among other things, but as something having its own, specific, mode of existence. The specificity with which he has invested his best pieces makes them *look* literal, yet this specificity is illusional by nature in that it forces the viewer to distinguish the art object from its sole materiality, making it unique and giving it a scale of its own.[146]

Although he analysed several works by Judd, Müller did not once mention reflections. Are we justified in concluding that, because they were not held to be significant by Judd himself, reflections were again disappearing from view for critics such as Müller, who were interested in Judd's works as philosophical propositions?

Agee had curated Judd's exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in 1968, and in 1975, on the occasion of another retrospective, he wrote an essay entitled 'A Judd Lexicon', which recounted the strategic developments in Judd's work since the early 1960s. Reflections were mentioned, but Agee's rationale was based on Judd's own testimony. In his 1971 discussion with Coplans, Judd had explained, 'The use of plexiglass exposes the interior, so the volume is opened up... It's fairly logical to open it up so that the interior can be viewed. It makes it less mysterious, less ambiguous.'[147] As an extension of this frankness, he often omitted the bottom side of the box:

> None of the plexiglass boxes has a bottom, thus in the clear ones the floor can be seen through the box. This opens the box up. The whole scheme has to do with defined ends and open body; this has been a sort of steady idea.[148]

Defined ends and open body were another example of Judd's enthusiasm for 'polarity and alliance.' Agee re-iterated Judd's claim that his use of Plexiglas and stainless steel was designed 'to expose interior volumes and sharpen the distinction between edge and shape.'[149] He noted the confusing effect, in Judd's 'stacks and wall boxes' of 'the funnel of reflections, transparencies and distortions created,'[150] but did not seek to explain it. Judd's colours, he suggested, were 'strong and assertive enough to "carry" the pieces

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[146] Ibid., 36
[147] Coplans, 'Don Judd: Interview,' p. 36
[148] Ibid., 41
[149] William C Agee, 'Unit, Series, Site: A Judd Lexicon' *Art in America*, vol 63, no3, May-June 1975, 43
[150] Ibid., 45

over the large areas they span without being excessively opulent or reflective.'[151] In contrast to Müller, Agee did not draw out the philosophical significance of such calculations, but he, like Pincus-Witten, understood that it was important not to succumb to opulence.

The positive valuation of 'difficulty' as opposed to pleasure was a reiteration of a familiar avant-garde position. What is more interesting to me is the way that such evaluations anticipated anxieties about the seductive pleasure of spectacle, which I discuss in the next chapter. I am motivated to consider spectacle partly because in recent returns to 'minimalism', the spectacularisation of minimalism itself is at issue. For some participants at the roundtable discussion in 1994, as we will see, the reiteration of generalisations about minimalism, and the uncritical reception of its formal appearance, threatened to jeopardise the effective transmission of its historically-located conceptual programme. At the same time, it is important to recognise that this discursive aspect of 'minimalism' is only part of the picture. While critics in the 1970s began to see the works in terms of the ossifying discourse around them, artists' views were less constrained.

[151] Ibid.

Chapter 5
Spectre and Spectacle

Some of the revolutionary credentials of minimal art were lost from view in the late 1980s. The co-opting of minimalism by a corporate culture of public art, with its deployment of minimal works as architectural adornment, effectively stripped it of its reputation for radicalism. The reception and quotation of minimal paradigms in art of the late 1980s and early 1990s – in uncritical pastiches and over-simplified 'subversions' – was often based on a glib, rather than nuanced, extrapolation of their aims. The spectre of 'spectacle' thus haunted minimalism twice over. How did the erstwhile supporters of Andre, Flavin, Judd, Morris, LeWitt *et al* regard the way 'minimalism' was apparently viewed by a new generation of artists, audiences and journalists?

'The Reception of the Sixties'

In 1994 Krauss convened a roundtable discussion addressing the 'The Reception of the Sixties' along with Denis Hollier, Michelson, Foster, Silvia Koblowski, Martha Buskirk, and Buchloh. The discussion was organised by *October*, Krauss explained, to address what seemed to be a 'particular resistance to 1960s art' at that moment, exemplified by the 'peculiar and unacceptable response' by journalists to a recent Robert Morris exhibition ('the first major retrospective of a Minimalist artist in an American museum'[1]). What began as a defence of Morris quickly shifted to an attack on Judd, as the participants began to make distinctions between them. Buchloh suggested that minimalist production that was 'demarcated by extraordinary consistency and continuity,' like Andre's, Flavin's and Judd's, had 'hardly been modified at all over the course of thirty years', and had become guilty of triumphalism – its practitioners had largely ceased to consider (and critique) the institutional contexts in which their work was shown. In contrast, he argued, Morris

[1] Krauss et al, 'The Reception', 3

> breaks all the paradigms; he breaks the parameters at all points, whenever possible and forces himself to look at all the questions, including the one that is the most painful for some of us at this table, which is figurative painting.[2]

Morris's radicality no longer consisted in formal innovation, but in diversity, conceptually framed. Thus, Krauss argued, a helpful characterisation of the value of 'minimalism' might not relate to its forms at all, but to 'the artistic persona understood in a meta-critical way [...] the artistic personality voided by industrialised production.'[3] She suggested that a 'perfectly operative genealogy' for minimalism might be based on Morris' example: 'Morris understood as the artist who voids the idea of consistency by adopting a peripatetic model of the artist instead.'[4] In valuing Morris's 'voiding' of consistency, Buchloh and Krauss disparaged other practitioners' display of it.

Now that she found Flavin and Judd less than compelling, Krauss was moved to re-consider her earlier view of their work. She re-assessed what it now looked like the work had been all along. It did not occur to her at the time, she said, that Judd and Flavin were 'really painters,'

> Yet now I perceive that not only did they begin as painters, they continued to be such. Even though Judd is the author of a famous essay arguing that painting should lose its virtual dimensions and become a specific object, he remains a painter – totally involved in questions of illusion.[5]

Unlike minimalists such as LeWitt, Smithson and Morris, who were not 'covert painters,'[6] Judd and Flavin stood accused of having an 'academic, *pictorial* understanding of Minimalism, and hence a way of holding on to a lot of notions – authenticity, originality, expressiveness – that other branches of minimalism brought into question.'[7] Michelson concurred, saying, 'It seemed to me, as well, that Judd was involved in painting and that both he and Flavin were, in different ways – through

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[2] Ibid., 5-6
[3] Ibid., 13
[4] Ibid., 13-14
[5] Ibid., 9
[6] (i.e. LeWitt, Smithson and Morris.) Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

reflection and through luminescence – contaminated by that frustrated wish of [Jules] Olitski's to spray colour on the air.'[8] How telling is the word 'contaminated.' In disparaging 'reflection' and 'luminescence,' Krauss and Michelson reverted to the emotive and judgemental terminology of 1960s anti-illusionism.

Unsurprisingly, for the younger respondents in the discussion, such as Foster and Kolbowski, who 'didn't experience Minimalism and the work of the 1960s firsthand,'[9] it was far from self-evident why such qualities should be considered undesirable in themselves. Kolbowski argued:

> I would only object to pictoriality when it becomes oblivious to historical change. I don't know that just the fact of rejecting pictoriality – or the fact of not doing so – is enough to determine or to dismiss a work as somehow academic or retrograde.'[10]

Kolbowski suggested that the 'academic, stylistic stage,' was entered into when something was 'repeated over and over as though it has nothing to do with any historical context,'[11] which, she conceded, had happened latterly with Judd. For the younger generation in 1994, it seems, a lack of historical consciousness was the new academicism, not illusionism. Krauss, Kolbowski implied, in adopting outdated polemical judgements as absolutes, was showing insufficient consciousness of history. She contrasted Krauss's revisionism with Buchloh's disaffection, which retained a sense of its own historical development. He described a gradual 'disinvest[ment]' from a previously strong commitment to minimalism because of its later 'betrayal of itself.'[12]

In general, Kolbowski said, she objected to readings of minimalism as a 'purely pictorial' mode, on the basis that it was 'a reductive understanding of that material [...] without any

[8] Ibid., 11
[9] Ibid., 17
[10] Ibid., 9
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 6

regard for the challenges they posed at the time.'[13] Infuriatingly, this was what happened 'in almost everything [she had] come across.' She objected, for example, to

> the recent work of someone like Janine Antoni, which I find really problematic in terms of the way it figures a relation to an earlier paradigm: you take something for its pictorial value, with no relation to what it means historically, and you produce work that critiques it purely on a pictorial level. In other words, the logic is: Minimalism was bereft of 'emotion' – and this ties into the journalistic criticism – and we have put the body and emotion back into work.[14]

Much more productive and interesting, Kolbowski felt, were those practices which interrogated some of the theoretical implications of minimalism:

> The Lacanian notion of subjectivity - that one is both the subject and object of one's existence – you see a lot of that in the work of the 1980s. So what those artists learned from the 1960s and 1970s was not *literally* transposed into the '80s work; it was recovered through a theoretical model.[15]

Krauss agreed that the 'current reception' of the 1960s was 'circling back through spectacle.' But far from accepting this as a criticism of her own retrospective condemnation of Judd, she insisted that 'for something to be available as an idea, it has to be available at the level of spectacle. Which is ultimately pictorial, since it means at the level of the image.'[16] In other words, there was something *intrinsic* in Judd's minimalism that had made it available for spectacular recuperation later on. She implied that Morris's 'voiding of the idea of consistency', for instance, was less immediately available to contemporary audiences because it was an overarching conceptual idea rather than a pictorial proposition. That the former was less *visible*, was, in itself, a recommendation.

What lay behind this uncompromising scepticism about image and spectacle? What was the thinking that led Krauss to insist that something 'available as an idea' in the 1990s,

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[13] Ibid., 8
[14] Ibid., 14
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 15

was something 'available at the level of spectacle'?[17] I consider the important issue of spectacle in more detail in the second half of this chapter.

For Foster, like Kolbowski, it was important that returns to the 1960s were not used to close off that situation retrospectively (i.e. to conclude the job of historical definition) but to open it up. In fact, he argued, much of the contemporary reception of the 1960s brought new things to light:

> Today there is a new access to the disturbances we associate with the 1960s, aesthetically, politically and institutionally, and it is not only about opportunism or charlatanism. This access is a possibility that many young artists and critics hold open for us all today, and we do everybody a great disservice if we pronounce it somehow closed before the fact. To regard history as already produced (as some of us seem to do) is really to regard it as already consumed [...] and that is to contribute to its specularization, not to challenge it.[18]

Foster argued that not all artists drawing on minimalist models were merely taking up its formal (pictorial) appearance and emptying out its original significance. There were some, he suggested, who were conducting a dialogue with 'minimalism' that opened it up for contemporary audiences as a history that was active in the present.

As I show in a series of case studies in chapters 6 and 7, artists such as Hiller, Hatoum Tatham and O' Sullivan, and de Cock, are not interested in asserting late modernist credentials by giving their works a spurious neo-minimalist 'look', nor are they taking aim at the easy targets produced by caricatures of 'minimalism' as reductive, impersonal, academic appeals to the eye. For these artists, the work of Judd and other so-called minimalists work is a complex and intriguing legacy: a bequest of forms that are abstract *and* concrete, which enable an array of potent conceptual manoeuvres. Before embarking on these case studies, I develop further a methodological model of inheritance. Two issues present themselves: What is the nature of the artists' negotiation of their 'inheritance'? And what does this negotiation reveal about the older work? To bring these issues into sharper focus, I look in detail at the notion of the 'return.'

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[17] Ibid.,
[18] Ibid., 21

The return in discourse

As I showed in chapter 2, Foucault considered poststructuralist 'returns' to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud in terms of the significance of the return for the structure of discourse itself. According to Foucault, Marx and Freud, as two 'initiators of discursive practices,' had produced the 'possibility and rules of formation of other texts.'[19] Practitioners in a discourse were compelled to '"return to the origin"' of that discourse in order to take account of the way in which the subsequent writings had re-interpreted the foundational texts. A return was anti-Hegelian, then - it privileged the *fragmented foundations* of the text, over the dialectical development of the discourse that had stemmed from it. Returns were necessary, firstly, in order to detect the inevitable distortions, divergences and travesties that the original discursive texts had been subject to in transmission: 'If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension.'[20] Secondly, returns revealed contradictions or absences in the original texts that were liable to be covered over in subsequent interpretations: it made sense to pay particular attention to 'those things registered in the interstices of the text, in gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude.'[21] A determination to explain or simplify the original text would often lead to its gaps being ignored, and its comprehensiveness overstated. Yet such gaps and absences were in fact 'essential' to discourse; no discourse could exist without them, because, according to Foucault, the primary or originary elements of a discourse were never finally fixed, but always subject to retroactive modifications.

In *Return of the Real*, Foster argued that Louis Althusser (1918-1990) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1989) exemplified Foucault's idea of the return. Foucault, he noted, wrote 'What

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[19] 'Marx and Freud as 'initiators of discursive practices,' not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a certain number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which nevertheless, remain within a field of discourse they initiated. [...] To extend psychoanalytic practice, as initiated by Freud, is not to presume a formal generality that was not claimed at the outset; it is to explore a number of possible applications.' Foucault, 'What is an Author', 310-11

[20] Ibid., 312

[21] Ibid.

is an Author?' four years after Althusser had published *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* and three years after Lacan's *Écrits* had appeared.[22] Foster observed that the value of these returns (to Marx and Freud respectively), was what they revealed about the *structure* of the discourse: they recovered 'not so much what Marxism or psychoanalysis means as *how* it means - and how it has transformed our conceptions of meaning.'[23] Althusser, for example, had moved beyond his previous existentialism, based on the 'early Marx', to perform a 'structuralist' reading based on 'the mature Marx' in *Capital*. 'For Althusser this is the scientific Marx of an epistemological rupture that changed politics and philosophy forever, not the ideological Marx hung up on humanist problems such as alienation.'[24] Althusser, Foster argued, defined 'a *lost break*' within Marx.[25] Lacan, meanwhile, pushed past his 'therapeutic adaptations of psycholanalysis' of the 1950s, to a 'linguistic' reading of Freud. 'For Lacan this is the radical Freud who reveals our decentred relation to the language of our unconscious, not the humanist Freud of the ego psychologies dominant at the time.'[26] In this case, Foster suggested, Lacan articulated 'a *latent connection* with Ferdinand de Saussure', a connection that was implicit in Freud, but had been impossible for him to recognise at the time, 'given the epistemological limits of his own historical position.'[27] The 'returns' of Althusser and Lacan, then, brought to attention the 'constructive omissions' in Marxist and Freudian discourse.[28]

How might these discursive manoeuvres illuminate Judd's legacy? There is undoubtedly a parallel if we consider Judd to be an 'initiator' of an open artistic 'sequence' (to use Kubler's term). I established in previous chapters that there were blind spots in Judd's writings which left elements in his works (specifically, certain optical and psychological effects) unaccounted for. My case studies will show that artists working in the field of installation since the 1980s have made returns to the optical confusion and the negative presence that were suppressed, or gradually excluded, in critical discourse. Can we

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[22] Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, October, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: 1996) 2
[23] Foster, *Return*, 2
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. (original emphasis)
[26] Ibid. (original emphasis)
[27] Ibid.
[28] Foucault, 'What is an Author', 312, cited by Foster, *Return*, 2

equate these with Althusser's and Lacan's recovery of 'constructive omissions'? Do they make gaps visible? Do they prompt a re-assessment of the structure and ontology of the art sequence? Certainly, it seems as if Judd's disavowal of 'illusionism' covered over what was, in fact, an important development in the use of illusions. In retrospect, we will see that this was unrecogniseable as a strategy (that is to say, it was difficult to perceive and difficult to articulate as such) because these illusions appeared in a new, radical form - a form that brought illusionism and literalism into productive conflict.

Another important formulation of the 'return' was to be found in Derrida's re-reading of Freud. Foucault's idea of the 'return' in discourse attested to the fact that there was no plenitude, even in the 'first' reading of a foundational text. Derrida also affirmed this, but with reference to individual psychology. In his 1967 essay on Freud, Derrida discussed Freud's assertion that memory was not a 'psychical property among others' but rather it was 'the very essence of the psyche.' Its 'resistance,' its 'opening to the effraction of trace,'[29] was what made thought possible, Freud argued. In other words, memory was not simply an echo of a previous experience; it was the 'resistance' by which experience was 'inscribed' in the first place. Derrida held that the stability of that familiar phrase 'in the first place,' both as a chronological and topological indicator, was problematised. Repetition did not '*happen to* an initial impression,' rather the possibility of repetition was always already there. Thus, Derrida concluded, 'It is the very idea of *a first time* which becomes enigmatic.'[30]

Foster drew on Foucault and Derrida in establishing the central premise of *Return of the Real* – that 1990s art had been shaped by its responses to 1960s models of practice. Foster called the 1960s the 'heyday of such returns.' Following Derrida, Foster looked to Freud to provide an analogy that allowed for discontinuity and repression within historical development. This analogy was derived from the psychic temporality of the body (i.e. the development of subjectivity) as opposed to its biological temporality (which had underpinned models of historicity in art since Vasari). Foster argued that the

[29] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing,' in *Writing and Difference*, 252
[30] Ibid., 254

significance of avant-garde events in particular was produced just as the self was structured, according to Freud: 'as a relay of anticipations and reconstructions of traumatic events.'[31] Thus, Foster argued, the avant-garde is

> never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments. It cannot be because it is traumatic - a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately, at least not without structural change. (This is the other scene of art that critics and historians need to register: not only symbolic disconnections but *failures to signify*.)[32]

Though it may have changed in many other respects, the avant-garde was perceived in 1996 as it had been since its beginning in the 19th century,[33] as a collective effort to change mentality. But, Foster implied, this change could only became legible in retrospect, once a shift in consciousness had occurred. He cited Freud's suggestion that 'One event is only registered through another that recodes it; we come to be who we are only in deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*).'[34] Suddenly perceiving something, that has in fact always been there, is a central theme of my thesis: noticing reflections for the first time, discerning blind spots in discourse, seeing a 'lost' theme taken up by another artist. I argue, too, that returning to the structural operation of a work allows it to be seen in relation to other philosophical propositions – as a conceptual signifier. Questions arise, however. Who or what *prompts* the return? How, exactly, does the recoding happen? Surely a return cannot be 'complete', any more than other events? There is a growing sense, as we explore the idea of a return, that it is an intriguing figure in itself. The return did not just describe a movement backwards, to recover what had been obscured; it also referred to the re-appearance of old themes and anxieties in the work of later artists.

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[31] Foster, *Return*, 29
[32] Ibid.
[33] See for example Henri de Saint Simon, 'The artist, the savant, and the industrialist' (1825), reprinted in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory 1815-1900*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 37-41
[34] Foster, *Return*, 29

The return as a spectre

What does the idea of the 'return' bring to art history, then? It is clearly not just a matter of a willed return *to* an enigma, but also a return *by* that enigma, which resurfaces unbidden as one looks at new work. Works that make reference to past cultural forms are, in effect, playing host to a ghost, which brings its secrets with it. As I showed in chapter 3, the reappraisal of inherited methodologies of art history in the 1960s hinged on how best to account for such apparent 'returns' in art – the teleological model favoured by Greenberg was challenged by artists such as Judd, Flavin and Smithson, who looked to Kubler, amongst others, for more disjunctive accounts of historical repetition and relay. I now want to dwell on the enigmatic undercurrents of the return as it has been characterised since the 1960s, and in particular the idea of the return as a kind of haunting in Derrida's 1993 book, *Specters of Marx*. Derrida develops an idiosyncratic analysis and suggestive language that will help me to express the uncanny relations that I perceive to be hidden in Judd's works, and later revealed in the works of Hiller and Hatoum. In addition, Derrida's thesis, developed in the context of a generation's growing awareness of the cultural ramifications of spectacle, will allow me to interrogate a specific anxiety that appears, in retrospect, to stalk these works.

Before moving on to Derrida, though, it is worth pointing out that a more comprehensive discussion of spectral art histories would begin with Aby Warburg's (1866-1929) model of art history, as presented through the pictorial montage created in his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (which he was still working on at his death). Warburg's interest in Nietzsche, his renunciation of evolutionary models of art history, and his depiction of history as a haunting (Warburg himself called *Mnemosyne* 'a ghost story for adults'[35]), all anticipated aspects of the post-structuralist discourses that I draw on here. Although a detailed analysis is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present thesis, a brief allusion to Warburg's project nonetheless serves to introduce certain themes that, as we shall see, Derrida went on to address in *Specters of Marx*. In Warburg's account it was the silence and the radical openness of a historical haunting that disrupted the 'matrices of

[35] Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 260

intelligibility', as Georges Didi-Huberman recently put it. He articulated Warburg's challenge to interpretation as follows:

> In the midst of all this "confused erudition," as Warburg described his own writing, how are we to find a path, to recover the "timbre of those unheard voices" that have been silent for so long? And how not to lose ourselves in this quest?[36]

Decades later, Michel de Certeau's construction of history in similarly spectral terms also anticipated Derrida's analysis. De Certeau (1925-1986) argued that all social space was haunted by silent voices and enigmatic fragments, 'There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits, hidden there in the silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not.'[37] In 1970, he suggested that the Western historian 'had received from society an exorcists' task.'[38] Elaborating on this in his 1975 book *The Writing of History*, de Certeau showed that historians could be said to sever precisely what they sought to resurrect through writing:

> After having successively passed through [Jules Michelet's] *History of France*, the shadows "have returned saddened to their tombs." Discourse drives them back into the dark. It is a deposition. It turns them into *severed souls* [...] Michelet's "tenderness" seeks one after another of the dead in order to insert every one of them into time [...] The dear departed find a haven in the text *because* they can neither speak nor do harm anymore. These ghosts find access through *writing* on the condition that they remain *forever silent.*[39]

Derrida asks, and indeed seeks to answer, the same question as Warburg and De Certeau: 'How are we to really hear and understand the returning spectre?'

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[36] Ibid.,13
[37] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984), 108
[38] Graham Ward, ed., *The Certeau Reader*, (Oxford and Massachussets: Blackwell, 2000) 18
[39] Ibid., 23-4

Derrida called the dual trajectory in history – the return *to* and return *of* past forms – a 'hauntology'. A spectre '*begins by coming back*,'[40] he noted. It only exists as a return (it is literally, a '*revenant*') but was, in fact, there from the beginning, waiting to re-appear. Prompted by Marx's admiration for Shakespeare, Derrida recalled the opening scene in Hamlet, where the guards await the reappearance of the spectre of Hamlet's father, the King of Denmark, (whose return will precipitate the events of the play): 'everything begins in the imminence of a *re*apparition.'[41] His return is anticipated.

In Derrida's account, the spectre designated what was left out, what was unclear. It did not come into clear focus even as it appeared in the present. The spectre, after all, was 'not-real.'

> Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. [42]

A re-apparition would have a dual nature, he explained: *both* a repetition and a singular event. The duality of such an event would not fit comfortably into a straightforward chronology, he suggested: 'haunting is historical to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar.'[43] Such duality would bring to light, within the historical subject's narrative, a spectre which was not parasitical or aberrant (as ghost stories might lead us to believe), but structural and intrinsic – similar, perhaps, to the presence of the unconscious in an individual. In fact, a hauntology did not displace teleological history so much as encompass it.

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[40] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans., Peggy Kamuf, (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 11
[41] Ibid., 4
[42] Ibid., 10
[43] Ibid., 4

> It would harbour within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly. [44]

Wholeness and logic could be conceived, but only, like individual events and circumscribed moments, as a provisional ordering of experience that occurred against a backdrop of dispersal and contradiction. In this respect, Derrida's hauntology shared common ground with Kubler's open sequencing discussed in chapter 3.

Just as Kubler's relays generated multiple views of a work, Derrida argued that no 'inheritance' was singular or unitary. A single event, or image, or line of poetry, would contain within it the scope for myriad interpretations. Like a translator, he suggested, one must choose from among a number of meanings in order to begin to understand an inheritance. Consider Hamlet's poignant observation, 'The time is out of joint.' Derrida noted that 'time' was construed by different French translations as 'le temps, but also l'histoire, and it is le monde, time, history, world.' [45] Like these translators, he suggested, 'one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. [46] A legacy must constantly be re-negotiated, then. Received 'meanings' would be interpretations of what remained, at heart, a mystery. Without mystery, he insisted, critical exchange with the past would not ensue.

> If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret – which says 'read me, will you ever be able to so do?' [47]

The 'secret' one inherited from incorporated the multiplicity of other possibilities that lay behind every chosen 'interpretation'. The indeterminacy of the secret allowed this

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[44] Ibid., 10
[45] Ibid., 16
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 16

multiplicity of possibilities to exist at once – an idea related to the famous quantum mechanical thought experiment suggested by Schrödinger. (It is said of a cat placed in a sealed box with a particle that may or may not become radioactive, that its well-being cannot be determined. It is therefore thought to be both alive and dead at the same time.) I argued in chapter 1 that reflections and shadows, in their contingency and their constantly shifting form, could be regarded as totems of Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible'. Derrida characterised spectres in a similar way.

'Speake to it, Horatio'

Derrida argued that a traditional academic mind-set would not be able to deal with such undecideable entities. One needed to be sensitive to the invisible features of haunting, but, 'As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient.'[48] For Derrida, this did not equip them to 'do what is necessary: speak to the specter.'[49] In *Hamlet*, the guard Marcellus implores the scholar Horatio to engage the ghost in conversation, to discover its identity and its intentions. 'Thou art a Scholler - speake to it, Horatio.' But according to Derrida, Horatio's attempts are 'imperious and accusing.' 'By heaven I Charge thee speake!... speake, speake! I Charge thee speake,' Horatio insists, and when the ghost makes to leave, he shouts, '[...] Stay and speake. – Stop it Marcellus.' Horatio 'wants to inspect, stabilize, *arrest* the specter in his speech,' according to Derrida.[50] But Horatio's admonitions are futile, and the ghost passes on having communicated nothing. Such a difficulty has afflicted all who have taken up Horatio's inflexible form of address, Derrida suggested. In fact, he claimed,

> There has never been a scholar who really, and as a scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts – nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being ('to be or not to be,' in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for

[48] Ibid., 11
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 12

> the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation.[51]

One of the most important characteristics of the spectre was that it undermined the logical oppositions which the 'traditional scholar' adhered to, by straddling them, (somewhat like Judd's polarity and alliance). The scholar's unwillingness to deviate from the real and the actual left him or her blind to the operation of *différance*. As Hamlet said to Horatio, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'[52] Derrida suggested that Marx might serve as the model for a new type of scholar, who

> would finally be capable, beyond the opposition of presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility [...] he would know how to address himself to spirits. [...] In any case, here is someone mad enough to hope to *unlock* the possibility of such an address.[53]

It is not my intention to set up a series of straw men, and the historians that I cite in this thesis are not of Horatio's imperious bent. Nevertheless, we might hypothesise from Derrida's comments that artists are somewhat better placed to 'speak to specters' than most art historians *qua* art historians. Artists are at liberty to engage with those elements in art history that cannot be verified with reference to artists' testimony, critics' statements or historical evidence. They are licensed to produce 'theatrical fiction' and 'speculation' without thereby straying beyond the confines of their discipline and losing credibility.

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[51] Ibid., 11
[52] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I:V, lines 174-5
[53] Derrida, *Specters*, 12

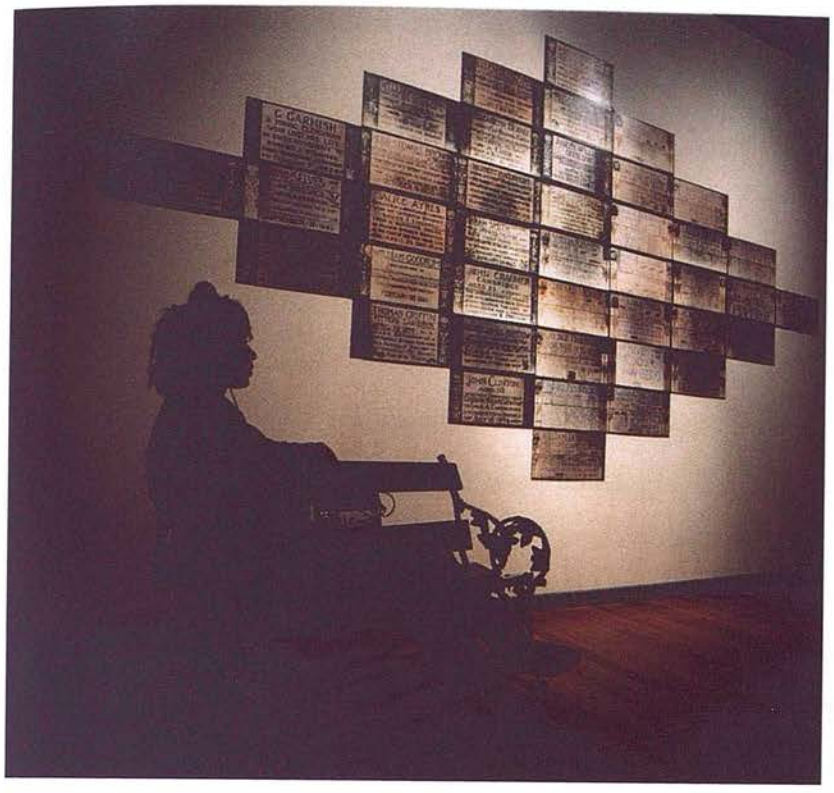

Fig. 5.1 Susan Hiller, *Monument,* 1980-81, c-type photographs, soundtrack and park bench, overall dimensions: 381 x 546 cm; soundtrack: 14 mins 23 secs. Tate Gallery, purchased 1994; photo Dave Lambert and Mark Heathcote

Fig. 5.2 Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence,* 1992, wire mesh lockers, slow moving, motorised light bulb, 198 x 185 x 490 cm, Installation: Chapter, Cardiff; Collection: Musée nationale d'art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Hiller's non-hierarchical ordering of artefacts, seen, for example, in *Monument* (fig. 5.1), and Hatoum's ambivalent physiological situations such as *Light Sentence* (fig. 5.2), were

constructed within an inherited minimalist framework. Hiller affirmed from the beginning of her career in the late 1960s that her artistic roots were in minimalism; Hatoum, after some years of politically-motivated performance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, made a return to her earlier use of a minimalist language of forms. In contrast, Tatham and O'Sullivan and de Cock, in a later generation, approach minimalism as a historical object. Works such as *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions* (fig. 5.3) and *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7* (fig. 5.4) function as meta-critical considerations of both 1960s minimalist objects and the spectacularisation of minimalism in its historical reception. Since the latter half of the 1990s, Tatham and O'Sullivan's work has contained an implicit rebuke to the unthinking recuperation of modernist gestures amongst some of their peers; de Cock often parodies the co-opting of minimalism in the architectural framing of 'cultural experience' in the 21st century. Unlike art historians, these artists are not bound to justify or 'prove' their interpretations of minimalism with reference to verifiable art historical sources; they are free to take notice of, to invoke, and to enter into a dialogue with the spectres of minimalism – those tensions and oppositions buried within the various practices, that defy straightforward reading.

Fig. 5.3
Joanne Tatham and Tom O' Sullivan, *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions*, 2005, mixed media, National Galleries of Scotland

Fig. 5.4 Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main,* 2005, Temporary installation at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt

Returning to the familiar (indeed, over-determined) art historical territory of the 1960s produces an uncanny jolt when elements *that were always there* suddenly come into view, as if for the first time. The effect is like turning up the volume on a recording that has been made in an empty room, and hearing voices in the static – previously dim signals are amplified. In negotiating an artistic inheritance through their own work – opening up actual space for the 'virtual space of spectrality' – artists can perhaps accommodate some of the multiplicity and contradiction that the spectre speaks of. This is one possible reading of Foster's comment that young artists held open the possibility of 'new access to the disturbances we associate with the 1960s, aesthetically, politically and institutionally.'[54] I hope to engage the spectres of minimalism as they make their returns, in order to gain a sense of the multiplicity of Judd's legacy, and in the process, to access some of the 'virtualities of the original.'[55]

I have suggested that minimalism was haunted twice over by the spectre of spectacle. I argued that the ghosts of minimalism, exorcised in anti-illusionist debates, returned to

[54] Foster, 'The Reception', 21
[55] Derrida, *Specters*, 19

haunt Judd's works in the form of immaterial effects and an uncanny sense of presence. Then, in the recuperation of Judd's work as spectacle in the 1980s, the anxiety about illusion evolved into an anxiety about spectacle, which was based on mistrust of an increasingly ubiquitous cultural shift towards 'virtuality.' These issues re-appeared in works by artists such as Hiller and Hatoum, which were constructed in a 'minimalist' sculptural language. Indeed, they too, like other artists in the 1980s, were haunted by the challenge that the spectacularisation of culture posed for any kind of avant-garde programme. Before returning to consider, in the next two chapters, the ways in which Hatoum, Hiller, Tatham and O'Sullivan, and de Cock accommodated and 'spoke to' the ghosts that had haunted minimalism, I examine how the supposed 'threat' of the spectacle was articulated by theorists, and in particular, I assess the corrosive effect it was said to have upon critical awareness.

Spectacle

We saw in chapter 1 that one of the 'problems' of attention, as it was perceived in the late 19th century, was its susceptibility to direction from outside – whether one was mesmerized by hoax mediums, lured into shopping arcades, or distracted by cinema. The conditions that produced this anxiety – the circulation of the commodity, the mass reproduction of representations, and the rise of automotive power – continued their rapid technological and market development in Europe and North America throughout the twentieth century. We saw in chapter 2 that the anxiety about seductive power of popular culture had coalesced, in artistic terms, into a struggle between the avant-garde (a deliberately 'difficult' and therefore rewarding art) and kitsch (undemanding entertainment and trite 'academicism'). The former supposedly preserved 'art' as an autonomous activity, which produced enlightened, self-critical viewers. The latter was cultural production that capitulated to the masses' desire for distraction, and offered viewers an uncritical, immersive, experience which simply passed the time. Greenberg's formulation of avant-garde and kitsch paralleled theorists of the Frankfurt School whose exponents argued that, because the products of the 'culture industry' were deliberately

tailored to the 'masses' ('manufactured more or less according to plan'[56]), their power to change mentality was compromised. In 1967, Adorno wrote:

> The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable. How this mentality might be changed is excluded throughout. The masses are not the measure, but the ideology of culture industry, even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses.[57]

In chapter 4, I argued that such anxieties may have motivated arguments about the supposed 'dangers' of illusionism. The anti-illusionist polemic, shaped by Judd and Morris themselves, focussed largely on the 'academic' character of 'illusionism' (that is, its adherence to the established artistic modes of the past). But I suggested that certain art critics might also have worried about the optical illusions that persisted in these artists' works because of their perceived affinity with the spectacular character of popular culture. In 1994, Krauss found Judd's 'pictorialist reflections' and 'the doubling caused by such reflections' particularly unpalatable.[58] Was there a more dangerous capitulation than academicism?

Modern anxiety about spectacle was a particular pre-occupation of French philosophers such as Debord, Baudrillard and Virilio, who considered American culture, in particular, to be *beset* by spectacle. Indeed, artists in America in the 1960s, Warhol primary amongst them, seemed to have a much more relaxed and ironic relationship with the spectacles of consumerism and popular culture. Greenberg's reduction of the avant-garde to self-reflexive abstraction had come to seem old-fashioned at a time when parody and pastiche were emerging as new experimental strategies in Fluxus, Pop Art, and Situationism in Europe. As we have seen, Krauss and Michelson's attitude to Judd in the 1990s suggests that, although they had distanced themselves from many of Greenberg's

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[56] Theodor Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', (1967) trans., Anson G. Rabinbach, *New German Critique* 6, Fall 1975, repr. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 85

[57] Ibid., 86

[58] Krauss, 'The Reception', 11

notions, they nevertheless retained a mistrust of kitsch, in its new incarnation as 'spectacle'. Both critics were acknowledged Francophiles – did they also sympathise with the scepticism of these afore-mentioned French writers? I now consider the critique of spectacle in some detail. I also explore Derrida's qualifications of this critique. He questioned the grounds for an unequivocal condemnation of the spectacle, just as Kolbowski and Foster questioned Krauss's absolutist stance towards pictorialism. The question I bear in mind throughout is, is it possible to engage with spectacle without succumbing to it?

Denigrating vision

As we will see, worries about spectacle in the later decades of the twentieth century focus on the idea that it over-privileges vision, excluding the opacity of the body. This suggests that anti-spectacle philosophies have arisen out of a wider 'denigration of vision', which the historian Martin Jay claimed was the prime impulse of twentieth-century French thought. Jay argued that the philosophical assault on the 'visual hegemony' began in the late 19th century; 'its animus was at first directed against the ancien scopic régime we have called Cartesian perspectivalism, and then it was broadened to include all variants of ocularcentrism.'[59] Like Crary, (see my discussion in chapter 1), Jay suggested that as modernity advanced, so did the grounds for rejecting 'the traditional sensual hierarchy' that placed vision at its apex, closest to understanding. The dethroning of vision was reflected in three changes in late 19th century philosophical thinking:

> The first concerns what can be termed the detranscendentalization of perspective; the second, the recorporealization of the cognitive subject; and the third, the revalorization of time over space.[60]

First, Jay argued, the 'detranscendentalization of perspective' occurred when Nietzsche's myriad, heterogeneous, individual perspectives succeeded in destabilizing the congruent,

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[59] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1993) 187. Jay's work covers some of the same ground as Crary's. Jay, too, contributed to Foster's volume, *Vision and Visuality*.
[60] Ibid.

universalist perspective of Descartes (1596-1650).[61] Second, he credited Henri Bergson (1859-1941) with helping to redirect philosophical enquiry 'back towards the body as intertwined with consciousness.'[62] Bergson's arguments built on the earlier experiments by Goethe and Müller and others, discussed in chapter 1, which revealed that what one perceived was produced by the body, rather reflected in some kind of 'mirror' mechanism in the mind.

Third, Jay also attributed the 'revalorization of time over space' to Bergson. Jay suggested that the 'spatialization of time', exemplified in the publically visible face of a clock, was linked to bourgeois practices that dominated the late 19th century: 'Despite the Romantic's attempt, to imbue time with personal emotional pathos, often melancholic, it remained in thrall to the exigencies of capitalist industrialization.'[63] I take it that Jay is referring to the increasing systematisation of time in modern life in, for example, the introduction of railway time and Taylorist time. As station networks grew across Europe and North America in the 19th century, the operation of a train timetable required that a new, centrally-regulated time be instituted, irrespective of the varying times of sunrise and sunset along its routes. In the early 20th century, Taylor's theory of *Scientific Management* advocated the organisation of labour tasks into segments that could be timed, thereby enabling the measurement and improvement of efficiency: the original rationale for the division of labour. Technological time, then, was imposed and enforced by institutions. It did not coincide with the personal experience of duration. Bergson insisted on the 'qualitative irreducibility of experienced time,' which, importantly, 'was not easily available to vision.'[64] Hearing and touch were more attuned to lived duration than sight. Paying close attention to lived duration within oneself, could counteract, according to Bergson, one's tendency to identify with an image of oneself. Bergson's motif anticipated the split that Lacan would develop later, between one's experience of selfhood, and one's mirror reflection. Bergson argued that,

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[61] Ibid., 190
[62] Ibid., 192
[63] Ibid., 195
[64] Ibid., 197

> We are generally content with [...] the shadow of the self projected in homogenous space. Consciousness, goaded by the insatiable desire to separate, substitutes the symbol for the reality, or perceives the reality only through the symbol. As the self thus refracted is much better adapted to the requirements of social life in general and language in particular, consciousness prefers it, and gradually loses sight of the fundamental self. // In order to recover this fundamental self, as the unsophisticated consciousness would perceive it, a vigorous effort of analysis is necessary, which will isolate the fluid inner states from their image, first refracted, then solidified in homogenous space.[65]

It was only with recourse to the body, Bergson implied, that the external 'image' of oneself would be revealed as nothing more than a solidified shadow. Bergson suggested that the struggle to distinguish between oneself and one's spectre took place *within* the body. Surrealists, according to Jay, shared Bergson's 'rejection of the Intellect with its fetish of clear and distinct ideas and bias for abstract form.' Poststructuralists had an affinity for 'Bergson's stress on both the importance of temporal deferral as opposed to spatial presence, and the qualitatively heterogeneous rather than the quantitatively homogeneous.'[66] I would add that Derrida's cautious optimism in *Specters of Marx* was based on a development of these ideas, as I show later.

The question for philosophers in the second half of the twentieth century was whether the co-opting of vision by the forces of spectacle and consumption meant the inevitable loss of all critical purchase - that is, the disappearance of any self-consciousness beyond a disquieting sense of alienation. Would the consciousness of duration and analysis of one's own lived experience still lead to greater self-knowledge, as Bergson had suggested? Indeed, was such a conclusion still possible?

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[65] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, (1889), trans., F L Pogson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), repr., Bergson, *Key Writings*, (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 72

[66] 'Although the phenomenologists and existentialists disdained his metaphysical yearnings, rejected his optimistic cosmology, and scorned his indifference to history and politics, they embraced many of his arguments against the fallacies of a visually constituted subjectivity. The Surrealists, despite their preference for Freud's version of the unconscious and their insistence on a libidinally charged notion of desire ignored by Bergson, shared his rejection of the Intellect with its fetish of clear and distinct ideas and bias for abstract form. And even poststructuralists of a still later era, with all their contempt for his celebration of vitalist immediacy, reveal an affinity for Bergson's stress on both the importance of temporal deferral as opposed to spatial presence, and the qualitatively heterogeneous rather than the quantitatively homogeneous.' Jay, *Downcast*, 207-8

'The Society of the Spectacle'

The sceptical view of 'spectacle' was articulated in the 1960s by Situationists. The term 'the society of the spectacle' was coined by Debord, a Marxist theorist and leading Situationist. As the art and architectural historian Simon Sadler explained, Situationists were concerned that the Americanisation of culture was producing 'a manufactured wonderment, a hype that concealed real processes of exploitation.'[67] They noted:

> the apparent blunting of class awareness in the West at large (by 1956 there were more white-collar than blue-collar workers) amidst the economic expansion fuelled by Marshall aid in Europe and the Monnet Plan in France, growth that massively increased the average worker's purchasing power for consumer goods and leisure.[68]

Standards of living were increased, but within a frankly narrow definition of the term.

In 1967 Debord asserted that where modern conditions of production prevailed, all of life was presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. 'Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.'[69] The 'spectacle', he argued, was 'the main production' of contemporary society – it was an 'advanced economic sector' that directly shaped a 'growing multitude of image-objects.'[70] Gradually, all aspects of human life, including social interaction and political consciousness, were reduced to 'mere appearance.'[71] In the realm of the spectacle, Debord argued, 'The worker does not produce himself, he produces an independent power. The success of this production, its abundance, returns to the producer as an abundance of dispossession.'[72] There was a sense that the spectacle was an impersonal force – the success of the spectacle made it increasingly difficult to dislodge, as it was precisely 'that which escape[d] the activity of men, that which escape[d] reconsideration and correction by their work.' It was 'the opposite of dialogue.'[73] The society of the spectacle, then, was self-perpetuating and

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[67] Sadler, *Situationist City*, 17
[68] Ibid.,
[69] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983) section 1
[70] Ibid., section 15
[71] Ibid., section 10
[72] Ibid., section 31
[73] Ibid., section 18

self-referential: lived reality was invaded by the simultaneous contemplation of, and absorption into the spectacular order. For Debord, the 'Society of the Spectacle' marked nothing less than the comprehensive alienation of the masses, 'the proletarianization of the world.'[74] 'From the automobile to television, all the goods selected by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds."'[75] As artists, Situationist International (SI) employed a series of techniques that were designed to interrupt this anaesthetised reception of the spectacle, and thus actively disrupt the 'spectacular order.'[76]

In spite of these activities and the key role played by Debord and the SI in the 1968 uprisings, Debord conceded in 1987 (fifteen years after the dissolution of SI in 1972) that the revolutionary aspects of his critique had done nothing to dislodge the Society of the Spectacle.[77] He recalled the two 'rival and successive forms of spectacular power' that he had had in mind at the time of writing - the dictatorial spectacle and the consumerist spectacle - and suggested that now a third, more comprehensive, form was now imposing itself.

> In 1967 I distinguished two rival and successive forms of spectacular power, the concentrated and the diffuse. Both of them floated above real society, as its goal and its lie. The former, placing in the fore the ideology grouped around a dictatorial personality, had accompanied the totalitarian counter-revolution, Nazi

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[74] Ibid., section 26

[75] Ibid., section 28

[76] *Détournement* (appropriation in collages of newspapers and magazines, for instance) was the '"rerouting," "hijacking," "embezzlement," "misappropriation," "corruption,"' of 'society's "pre-existing aesthetic elements".' (Sadler, *Situationist City*, 17) *Dérive* ('drift') referred to the artists' 'playful-constructive' way of wandering through a city, alert to 'the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they [found] there.' (Ibid., 77-8, citing Guy Debord, 'Théorie de la derive,' *Les lévres nues*, no. 9 (Brussels, November 1956). In 'analyzing the factors affecting their mood, behaviour and choice of route,' the artists' 'psychogeography' of a place would, they anticipated, bring to light the lived functional and social relations concealed by the society of the spectacle. (Sadler, *Situationist City*, 20)

[77] 'In 1967, in a book entitled *The Society of the Spectacle,* I showed what the modern spectacle was already in essence: the autocratic reign of the market economy, which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty, and the totality of new techniques of government that accompanied this reign. The disturbances of 1968, which in several countries lasted into the following years, having nowhere overthrown the existing organization of the society from which it springs apparently spontaneously, the spectacle has thus continued to reinforce itself, that is, to spread to the furthest limits on all sides, while increasing its density in the center. It has even learned new defensive techniques, as powers under attack always do.' Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Macolm Imrie, (NewYork: Verso, 1998) section II

> as well as Stalinist. The latter, driving salaried workers to freely operate their choice upon the great variety of new commodities that confront them, had represented the Americanization of the world, a process which in some respects frightened but also successfully seduced those countries where it had been possible to maintain traditional forms of bourgeois democracy. Since then a third form has been established, through the rational combination of these two, and on the basis of a victory of the form which had showed itself stronger: the diffuse. This is the integrated spectacular, which has since tended to impose itself globally. [...][78]

The 'Society of the Spectacle' had been growing in ubiquity in 1967, according to Debord – although the influence of American consumerism had 'frightened' the socialist contingent in Europe, it had nevertheless successfully seduced Europe's bourgeois populations. Twenty years later, he suggested, in its new form, which integrated concentrated and diffuse models, the 'Society of the Spectacle' had now become utterly inescapable. What had been conceived in the 1960s as alienation from reality was now the *only* reality. What had once been driven by particular ideologies was now, to all intents and purposes, 'occult':[79]

> When the spectacular was concentrated, the greater part of peripheral society escaped it; when it was diffuse, a small part; today, no part. The spectacle is mixed into all reality and irradiates it.[80]

Through the rise of branding and advertising, television, car ownership and so on, the infiltration of people's personal lives by the operations of modernity had created a plane of experience increasingly perceived as disconnected from any tangible, 'real' world.

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[78] 'Whereas Russia and Germany were largely responsible for the formation of the concentrated spectacular, and the United States for the diffuse form, the integrated spectacular seems to have been pioneered in France and Italy by the play of a series of shared historical features, namely, the important role of the Stalinist party and unions in political and intellectual life, a weak democratic tradition, the long monopoly of power enjoyed by a single party of government, and the necessity to eliminate an unexpected upsurge in revolutionary activity [since 1968].' Debord, *Comments*, section IV

[79] 'As regards the concentrated side, the controlling center has now become occult, never to be occupied by a known leader, or clear ideology. And on the diffuse side, the spectacular influence has never before put its mark to such a degree on almost the totality of socially produced behavior and objects. For the final sense of the integrated spectacular is that it integrates itself into reality to the same extent that it speaks of it, and that it reconstructs it as it speaks. As a result, this reality no longer confronts the integrated spectacular as something alien.' Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

'The Ecstasy of Communication'

Jean Baudrillard, who was also associated with Situationism in the late 1960s, likewise attested to the new levels of immersion in the spectacle (the *simulacra* as he termed it) in the 1980s. In 1967, he had critiqued the notion of the object as a simple given - 'as obvious fact, substance, reality, use value' – and proffered instead the object as a sign 'heavy with meaning.'[81] Such meanings were established, he had suggested, within different 'logics' or networks of signification: 'a *phantasmatic logic*,' that referred principally to psychoanalysis and its idea that through identifications and projections, desire could operate at the level of objects; and a '*differential social logic*' that referred to sociology and anthropology, which regarded consumption in terms of 'the production of signs, differentiation, status and prestige.'[82] In 1983 Baudrillard re-assessed this semiotic approach, which had been based, he explained, on a 'mirror' analogy:

> The description of this whole intimate universe – projective, imaginary and symbolic – still corresponded to the object's status as mirror of the subject, and that in turn to the imaginary depths of the mirror and the 'scene': there is a domestic scene, a scene of interiority, a private space-time (correlative, moreover, to a public space). The oppositions subject/object and public/private were still meaningful.[83]

Baudrillard's mirror and scene had been, in some respects, a development of the *camera obscura* model of consciousness. By 1983, however, Baudrillard found that the basis for such a model had disappeared. His 'System of Objects' was gradually being replaced by what he termed the 'Ecstasy of Communication.'

> If one thinks about it, people no longer project themselves into their objects, with their affects and representations, their fantasises of possession, loss, mourning, jealousy: the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished, and even if it can be marked out in detail, one feels that it is not really here that things are being played out.[84]

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[81] Jean Baudrillard, 'Ecstasy of Communication', trans. John Johnstone in Hal Foster ed., *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press (London: 1985) 126 (first published as *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Bay Press, Port Townsend: 1983)
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 127

Television had transformed the subject's relationship with objects and scenarios, from a 'hot' drama of desire and possession, into a 'cold' psychotropic fascination.[85] The subject in charge of a car, for instance, was described by Baudrillard as a 'computer at the wheel', rather than a 'drunken demiurge of power' as it might have been in the heady days of Futurism. As an analogy for one's interaction with the world, the functional logic of 'driving' had replaced the subjective logic of 'possession and projection': 'the vehicle now becomes a kind of capsule, its dashboard the brain, the surrounding landscape unfolding like a televised screen.'[86] Baudrillard referred to this as 'telematics':

> [Our private sphere] is no longer a scene where the dramatic interiority of the subject, engaged with its objects as with its image, is played out. We are here at the controls of a micro-satellite in orbit, living no longer as an actor or dramaturge but as a terminal of multiple networks. Television is still the most direct prefiguration of this. But today it is the very space of habitation that is conceived as both receiver and distributor, as the space of both reception and operations, the control screen and terminal which as such may be endowed with telematic power – that is, with the capability of regulating everything from a distance, including work in the home and, of course, consumption, play, social relations and leisure.[87]

The ways in which wireless technology and internet broadband have been adopted in recent years suggests that this description is still apt. Baudrillard's image of the previously 'private' sphere of life, now transformed into an environment that is both public and private at once, is wholly recognisable. He surmised that,

> … today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network. In place of the reflexive transcendence of mirror and scene, there is a nonreflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold – the smooth operational surface of communication.[88]

In French, as in English, 'réfléchir' denotes a form of meditative thought as well as optical reflection. Baudrillard took advantage of this *double entendre* to suggest that the subject in 1968 was still reflexive, self-conscious, thoughtful, whereas a subject in 1983 had turned into an 'immanent surface where operations unfold', that is, a surface which

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[85] See ibid., 132 for the hot/cold distinction.
[86] Ibid., 127
[87] Ibid., 128
[88] Ibid., 126-7

was 'nonreflecting' and thoughtless (hence the conclusion that 'the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished'). It is as if the networks of culture were now operating *through* the subject, rather than *for* the subject. Baudrillard's analysis suggested that any remnants of self-consciousness (whether characterized as the *detachment* of Enlightenment thought, or as the *alienation* posited by a Marxism) had become eroded in the intervening years since 1968, with the arrival of what he called the 'universe of communication':

> The era of hyperreality now begins. What I mean is this: What was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived out on earth as metaphor, as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into reality without any metaphor at all, into an absolute space that is also that of simulation.[89]

Of course, Baudrillard appeared perfectly capable of self-consciousness and intellectual distance in writing his essay; and despite technological advances that have since further exacerbated the 'hyperreality' of a telematic culture, we are, even today, a long way from 'absolute' simulation. Nevertheless, Baudrillard's rhetorical position contains a useful characterisation of contemporary experience. His themes - the ubiquity of filmic and televisual images and the prevalent sensation of 'driving' through life - emphasize the shift from contemplation or confrontation between subject and objects, which had by Baudrillard's account dominated philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s, to a new sense of movement, circulation, navigation through a network of phenomena.

> Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the "proteinic" era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication. [90]

I have established that although Judd was preoccupied with objects in the 1960s, yet his works contained within them ample scope to reflect on movement and its effect on consciousness. I will explore this in more detail in chapter 8.

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[89] Ibid., 128
[90] Ibid., 127

Bergson had argued that it was important to retain a sense of 'fluid inner states' as distinct from one's 'image.'[91] Perhaps with the advent of the 'Ecstasy of Communication' becoming conscious of one's own physical and psychological *trajectories* could be a way of reintroducing the body into disembodied experience? For Baudrillard's friend and contemporary, Virilio, even 'duration' and trajectory were undermined by the simultaneity and virtuality of telematic culture.

The decline of duration, the triumph of speed

Virilio has spent much of his career exploring the impact of twentieth century technologies (particularly the mechanisms of war and architecture) on vision and consciousness. In his 1990 essay 'Polar Inertia', he traced the paradoxical role of increased movement and circulation in bringing about the '*fundamentally relativistic inertia*'[92] of telepresence. Virilio pointed to the moon landing on July 21 1969 as the moment when the 'ground' was lost as a fixed point of reference. Until that point, the earth had been conceived pretty much as the 'AXIS MUNDI of the Galilean age.'[93] Although the physicist Ludwig Boltzmann (1844-1906) and the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) had already articulated the growing importance of the corporeal body as the center of experience, the earth remained a fixed point against which motion and rest were measured. As Husserl had put it 35 years before the moon landing,

> 'The Earth itself, in its original form of representation, does not move, nor is it at rest; it is in relation to the Earth that motion and rest first take on sense.' [...] 'As long as I do not possess a representation of a *new ground* [*sol*] such that the earth in its regular and circular course may have the sense of a compact body in movement and at rest, as long again as I do not acquire a representation of an *exchange of grounds* and thus a representation of the becoming corporeal of two grounds; until then the earth is indeed a ground and not a body. *The earth does not move.*'[94]

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[91] See n.65

[92] Paul Virilio, 'Polar Inertia' (1990) in James Der Derian ed., *The Virilio Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 131

[93] Ibid., 118

[94] Ibid., 119 citing Virilio, *La terre ne se meut pas*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1989) 48

When the pilot of Apollo XI pronounced the words, 'Altitude Zero', argued Virilio, 'from then on there was another ground, a GROUND ABOVE.'[95] Even more important though, than the advent of a second ground, was the appearance of that ground on television. 'The *event* was not so much the retransmission of televised images from more that 300,000 kilometers from earth, as the *simultaneity of vision between the moon on the screen and in the window.*'[96]

For Virilio, the loss of reference ground led, in turn, to the 'decline of duration,' as objective measures of time were superseded by notions of 'speed'.[97]

> For the committed phenomenologist, the loss of 'terrestrial distances' is therefore not much due to the motor or power of these transmitters which reduce distances of a perceived world to nothing, but rather that of *the advent of a dominant psychological time*. A mixture of the relativity of the living (of the living-present) and that of these technical vectors, completes the defeat of the constituted world, the decentering of the animate being.[98]

The psychological and political implications of this shift in consciousness were significant. Like Baudrillard, Virilio anticipated a profound disruption in the way people would relate to the world and its objects. As he put it in another essay, 'The specific negative aspect of these information superhighways is precisely this loss of orientation regarding alterity (the other), this disturbance in the relationship with the other and the world.'[99] This distance between the self and its objects evaporated. Instead of contemplation, there was conflation. Listen, he said in 'Polar Inertia', to the designer Alesandro Mendini:

> Man is himself a composite of instruments. If I sit on down in the ground, I am a seat. If I walk, I am a means of transportation. If I sing, I am like a musical instrument. The body is the primary collection of objects at the disposition of

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[95] Virilio, 'Polar Inertia', 118 (original emphasis)
[96] Ibid. (original emphasis)
[97] 'The corporal EGOCENTRATION that today survives the loss of the original *arché* called 'earth' – since the acquisition of a GROUND ABOVE – is then coupled with a temporal EGOCENTRATION where time, the psychological *durée*, prevails definitively over that of the constituted world.' Ibid., 120
[98] Ibid.,
[99] 'Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!' *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1995, cited in Der Derian, *Virilio Reader*, 5

> man, whereas tools are artificial extensions, monstrous prostheses... The primitive, the nomad, the hitchhiker, condense their tools into themselves, coincide with their own house. *They are a house, they are an architecture.*

For Virilio, it was no longer just instruments that were concentrated in us, but the environment as well. We now coincided with 'the OIKOUMENE, the whole of the inhabited earth.'[100] In short, as Virilio's editor, James de Derian put it, 'virtuality destroys reality.'[101] Was this in itself a great loss? Perhaps not, but for Virilio, the very basis for ethical and political decision-making was jeopardised, as the 'other' was lost from view.

> For Virilio, the interconnectivity of virtual systems is not ushering in a new day for democracy but a new order of *telepresence*; high-paced interconnectivity is becoming, technically and literally, a substitute for the slower-paced intersubjectivity of traditional political systems. He sees the self as a kind of virtually targeted ground zero; once voided, concentric circles of political fallout spread, leaving in the vitrified rubble all responsibility for the other that forms the prior condition for truly intersubjective, ethical, *human* relationship.[102]

For Virilio, 'winning today, whether it's a market or a fight, is merely not losing sight of yourself,'[103] and, presumably, not losing sight of the 'other', either.

'Specters of Marx'

Debord, Baudrillard and Virilio's scepticism was designed to attack a broader postmodernist position which was more celebratory in tone. There was palpable optimism amongst many cultural commentators in the 1980s and 1990s about the democratising impulse of a culture that rejected established hierarchies of value and allowed individuals to select, or 'shop for', aspects of their own identity. This cultural optimism echoed the triumphal political promotion of individualism and free markets. Following the introduction of Perestroika by Gorbachev in the USSR, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the 'end' of the cold war in that decade, Francis Fukuyama's claim, that the global adoption of free market economies would bring about 'the end of

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[100] Virilio, 'Polar Inertia', 123
[101] Der Derian, *Virilio Reader*, 5
[102] Ibid.
[103] Virilio, Interview in *Block 14* (Autumn, 1988), 4-7

history,' was widely applauded. For those who wanted to retain political and historical consciousness, however, rather than abdicate it, such a vision was something to be lamented. As we have seen, the 'threat' was envisaged as a kind of unquestioning immersion in virtuality. Derrida, addressing a conference about the legacy of Marx in 1993, concerned himself with how we might resist this immersion long enough to gain a critical perspective on it.

For him, just as for Debord and Virilio, it was no longer a matter of being alienated by certain spectral encroachments into public space, it was now a question of public space itself being turned into a spectre. Once, the political sphere had been situated at the frontier between the public and private, Derrida argued. Social, cultural and political boundaries were now more porous, and in order to address something necessarily elusive, new modes of criticality would be needed.

> If this important frontier [between public and private] is being displaced, it is because the medium in which it is instituted, namely the medium of the media themselves (news, the press, tele-communications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele-iconicity, that which in general assures and determines the *spacing* of public space, the very possibililty of *res publica* and the phenomenality of the policitical), this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death. It requires then, what we call [...] *hauntology*.[104]

Simply addressing this impersonal (inhuman), all-encompassing techno-tele-discursivity and iconicity, would begin to mitigate their effects; but any attempt at questioning this new hegemony would have to take into account its newly spectral characteristics:

> the new speed of *apparition* (we understand this word in its ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations, and speculations that today deploy unheard-of powers. [105]

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[104] Derrida, *Specters*, 51
[105] Ibid., 54

Derrida sought to establish the value of a Marxist 'inheritance' in a situation when the 'death of Marxism' was triumphantly proclaimed. He suggested that one might productively heed Marx's injunction to 'speak to ghosts'. Marx himself employed spectro-poetics to a number of ends. He described monetary value, for example, as spectral: "The body of money is but a shadow [*nur noch ein Schatten*]."[106] Indeed, Derrida pointed out, 'The whole movement of idealization (*Idealisierung*) that Marx [...] describes, whether it is a question of money or of ideologems, is a production of ghosts, illusions, simulacra, appearances or apparitions.'[107] Marx did not *like* ghosts, Derrida emphasized, but he thought about them all the time. He believed that he could oppose them 'like life to death, like vain appearances of the simulacrum to real presence.' But could such a strategy succeed?

> [Marx] believes enough in the dividing line of this opposition to want to denounce, chase away, or exorcise the specters but by means of critical analysis and not by some counter-magic. But how to distinguish between the analysis that denounces magic and the counter-magic it still risks being? [108]

Derrida argued that denouncing 'magic' did not do away with it – indeed, it simply re-inforced its part in a dialectical pairing. He saw an insurmountable problem with Marx's (and Debord's) apparent belief in this dividing line between simulacrum and real presence. Like all of us, he said, Marx had 'an unconditional preference for the living body.' It was precisely because of this that he rejected simulacral, spectral representations of the body, waging 'an endless war against whatever represents it, whatever is not the body but belongs to it, comes back to it: prosthesis and delegation, repetition, difference.' But this was a form of denial, according to Derrida. What Marx 'does not want to know' is that the 'living ego is auto-immune,' – it *contains the spectral within it*. The ego, in order to 'constitute itself' was 'necessarily led to welcome the other within' (that is, the unconscious). It was therefore compelled to 'take the immune

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[106] Ibid., 45, citing Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, chapter 2 part 2b (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 109
[107] Ibid., 45
[108] Ibid., 47

defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary, and direct them at once, *for itself and against itself.*[109]

Marx spoke to ghosts in order to chase them away, in order to produce what Derrida called a 'critical but pre-deconstructive' ontology of presence.[110] For Derrida, though, 'ontology' was 'a conjuration': chasing ghosts away simply reinforced their spectral character.[111] In any case, chasing away one's own spectre would cement, rather than alleviate, one's unselfconscious immersion in the virtual. 'Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back?'[112] Derrida asked. Any self-reflection - seeing oneself seeing - entailed a haunting. He suggested that "I am" would mean "I am haunted": 'I am haunted by myself who am (haunted by myself who am haunted by myself who am… and so forth). Wherever there was Ego, *es spukt*, "it spooks."'[113]

What made the doubling/splitting transaction accessible, what exceeded its dialectical struggle, was the sense of uncanny that attended it. Derrida was able to bring Marx and Freud together in this regard: the idiom of Marx's '*es spukt*,' he suggested, played a similar role to Freud's 'Das Unheimliche.' The significance of this affinity with the uncanny was left out of most translations of Marx, he argued:

> Its translation always fails, unfortunately, to render the link between impersonality or the quasi-autonomy of an operation [*spuken*] without act, without real subject or object, and the production of a figure, that of the *revenant* [*der Spuk*]: not simply 'it spooks,' as we just ventured to translate, but 'it returns', 'it ghosts', 'it specters.'[114]

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[109] Ibid., 141 (original emphasis)
[110] 'Marx continues to want to ground his critique or his exorcism of the spectral simulacrum in an ontology. It is a - critical but pre-deconstructive - ontology of presence as actual reality and objectivity. This critical ontology means to deploy the possibility of dissipating the phantom, let us venture to say again of conjuring it away as representative consciousness of a subject, and of bringing this representation back to the world of labor, production, and exchange, so as to reduce it to its conditions.' Ibid., 170
[111] Ibid., 161
[112] Ibid., 176
[113] Ibid., 133
[114] Ibid., 133

The quasi-antonomy of 'it spooks' contributed a third element to the splitting/doubling. In this respect, we might regard Derrida's 1960s description of reflection as a concrete precursor to the image of a haunting:

> For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of speculation becomes difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three.[115]

In Rodolphe Gasché's study of Derrida, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Gasché affirmed that it was this 'third' element in reflection that kept the situation open - that moved the situation beyond a dialectic: 'The alterity that splits reflection from itself and thus makes it able to fold itself to itself – to reflect itself – is also what makes it, for structural reasons, incapable of closing upon itself.'[116] Gasché concluded that thinking about reflection, which was caught up in an endless referencing of the Other, prevented 'all ultimate recoiling into self.' It opened itself up to 'the thought of an alterity, a difference that remains unaccounted for by the polar opposition of source and reflection, principle and what is derived from it, the one and the Other.'[117] If we agree that the uncanny presses itself on one's attention when perceiving reflections and shadows and the action of spectres, then we might conclude that it serves an important purpose in keeping the situation open enough for self-conscious analysis, not just self-consciousness.

The point, Derrida concluded, was:

> right away to go beyond, in one fell swoop, the first glance and thus to see where the glance is blind, to open one's eyes wide there where one does not see what one sees. One must see, at first sight, what does not let itself be seen.[118]

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[115] Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), trans., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), cited by Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1986) 101-2

[116] Gasché, *Tain*, 102

[117] Ibid.

[118] Derrida, *Specters*, 149

We could only understand the mystical character of the commodity, for instance, if we saw what did 'not let itself be seen.' Derrida offered a re-reading of Marx's discussion about commodities in *Capital* that focused on their spectral qualities.[119] He enjoyed the fact that Marx illustrated his explanation 'by causing a table to turn', or rather by 'recalling the apparition of a turning table.'[120] (As Derrida's translator pointed out, *une table tournante* often referred to the table at a séance.) The 'error' of our 'first sight' of the table, Derrida suggested, was to see it only in terms of its use-value, to see it in terms of 'the phenomenality of the phenomenon, a quite simple wooden table.'[121] If one kept to use-value, he continued, 'the properties of the thing are always very human' and reassuring for that reason.[122] However, once it was perceived as a commodity, the table took up a place 'on stage', taking on the role of actor and character at the same time. '*Coup de théâtre*,' Derrida wrote, 'The woody and headstrong denseness is metamorphosed into a supernatural thing.'[123] The commodity was a '"thing" without phenomenon,' but it retained a 'bodiless body'.[124] What surpassed the senses (it was invisible, intangible, inaudible and odourless), nevertheless passed before us 'in the silhouette of a sensuous body that it nevertheless lacks or that remains inaccessible to us.'[125] Derrida went on:

> [...] the table has feet, the table has a head, its body comes alive, it erects its whole self like an institution, it stands up and addresses itself to others, first of all to other commodities, its fellow beings in phantomality, it faces them or opposes them.[126]

This constituted a '*capital* contradiction', according to Derrida, which did not only have to do with 'the incredible conjunction of the sensuous and the supersensible in the same Thing,' it also related to 'the contradiction of *automatic autonomy*, mechanical freedom,

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 150
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 150-1
[125] Ibid., 151
[126] Ibid.

technical life.'[127] The commodity-table was an automaton that 'mime[d] the living.' It was a 'theatrical machine.'[128]

There is a striking echo, here, of Fried's disquiet about 'theatrical' minimalist objects. Can we attribute Fried's dislike of literalism to a deeper reluctance about confronting the spectrality of art? Designating something as art is a similar operation to designating something as a commodity; regardless of whether artworks are considered as commodities themselves. Changing the emphasis of the foregoing discussion about anti-illusionism/literalism, we might speculate that literalism and its orchestration of a supposedly 'direct' experience of objects was an artistic strategy that aimed to deal with the spectrality of art by exorcising its spectral qualities. In the light of Derrida's point that 'phenomenological good sense' was only be valid 'for use-value,' the literalist concentration on the phenomenological values of materiality and specificity might even seem deluded. Certainly Fried's reaction suggests that such strategies succeeded only in conjuring the spectre anew. I have been arguing, however, that it is this *quasi-failure* which makes such work interesting, as it brings the intrinsic haunting to light.

Derrida had followed Marx's own terminology in describing the theatrical character of the commodity, but he took issue with Marx's implication that the haunting came after the table's 'entry' on stage.

> To say that [...] the wooden table [...] *comes on stage* as commodity *after* having been but an ordinary thing in its use-value is to grant an origin to the ghostly moment. Its use-value, Marx seems to imply, was intact.[129]

But Derrida insisted that use-value was not 'identical to itself.'[130] From the outset, the table was already open 'to iterability, to substitution, to exchange, to value.'[131] Indeed the very concept of 'use-value' was predicated on being distinguished from 'exchange-

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[127] Ibid., 153
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 159
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 160

value.'[132] Thus, the table was haunted from the beginning: '[use-value] bereaves it in advance.'[133]

An art object was defined in relation to other art objects, just like commodities, which had 'business with other commodities.' Art, like 'the market' was a 'front, a front among fronts, a confrontation.'[134] As Derrida himself pointed out, 'if a work of art can become a commodity, and if this process seems fated to occur, it is also because the commodity began by putting to work, in one way or another, the principle of an art.'[135] By this reckoning, minimalist objects were pre-destined to fail in any attempt to exist 'directly', i.e. in wholly phenomenological terms, because they, too, were haunted by their commodity/art operation from the beginning. Recall, for instance, Roses's 'sense of loss looking at these big, blank, unhappy, empty things, so anxious to cloak their art identity that they were masquerading as objects.'[136] Interestingly, in 1975, Müller equated this 'masquerade' in Judd's work with 'illusion' (extending and redefining the polemical term in the process). It was this illusion, he argued, which made Judd's programme so interesting: it brought to light the cultural and perceptual mechanisms which conceived of objects as art.

> His insistence on specificity is far from the negativism of systematic anti-illusionism, all of which is rooted in anti-art and precludes the possibility of endowing the work with the *qualities* that make it specific. [...] The specificity with which he has invested his best pieces makes them *look* literal, yet this specificity is illusional by nature in that it forces the viewer to distinguish the art object from its sole materiality, making it unique and giving it a scale of its own.[137]

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[132] 'Just as there is no pure use, there is no pure use-value which the possibility of exchange and commerce [...] has not in advance inscribed in an *out-of-use* – an excessive signification which cannot be reduced to the useless.' Ibid.
[133] Ibid.,161
[134] Ibid., 155
[135] Ibid., 162
[136] Rose, *ABC Art*, 281-2
[137] Müller, 'Ten Years', 36

The 'illusion' of specificity draws out the disjunction between 'art' and 'materiality.' For Müller, this was nothing to do with the illusions that other critics had noted over the years:

> Such kind of illusion has little to do with mistaking the skin of specific objects for the substance of their full volumes, with expecting weight where there are light materials, or with any illusion of that sort. It has to do with the much more complex cultural and perceptual mechanisms which allow one to abstract particular entities out of the continuum of experience and to give it an additional 'art' value.[138]

Yet, I suggest that it was precisely the *strangeness* of these optical effects that gave the lie to the works' supposed literalism. Spectral in themselves, the unexpected appearance of reflections and light shadows had an 'uncanny' impact. It was this sense of a 'bodiless body' that 'spook[ed],' which served to draw attention to the presence of *other* spectres – the spectres of illusionism and spectacle, as well as the spectre of commodity.

Derrida's injunction to the scholars of the future was to exorcise ghosts, not in order to chase them away, but in order to bring them into the present, to allow them to 'return'.

> If he loves justice at least, the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow should learn [...] to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself: they are always *there*, specters, even if they don't exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not there yet.'[139]

I will show shortly that the artists in my case-studies take this injunction to heart.

Derrida's challenge, then, was to see 'what does not let itself be seen'. The Italian aesthetician Mario Perniola (b.1941) who was also closely associated with Situationist International in the late 1960s and subsequently developed Derrida's critique of logocentrism and Baudrillard's themes of simulacra and seduction, recently formulated an approach to art that would take account of this challenge. The 'shadow' of art – 'in

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Derrida, *Specters*, 176

which is portrayed anything disquieting and enigmatic that belongs to it'[140] – is what appears *beside* the works, according to Perniola. He contrasted this shadow with the 'bright light' cast by two widely operative approaches to art: of which one identified art wholly with the art object, the other attempted to resolve art entirely into life (these positions were inherited from formalist Modernism and Dada, respectively). Though each claimed to 'capture art in its fullest light,' Perniola argued, both strategies removed the 'problematic of art' in favour of something much more banal.[141] In fact, he concluded, 'the more diurnal and banal is the approach to artistic experience, the more what is essential withdraws and takes refuge in the shadow.'[142] Thus, Perniola suggested that attending to the shadow was a 'third' regime of art and aesthetic experience. Going beyond the aesthetic sublimation of form on the one hand, and the rejection of all aesthetic separation on the other, the shadow exerted what he called the 'sex appeal of the inorganic.' The shadow was the 'felt differences' of a work, he suggested, citing Jean-François Lyotard,

> 'Thought is art because it yearns to make "present" the other meanings that it conceals and that it does not think. There is, in art as in thought, an outburst, the desire to present or signify to the limit the totality of meanings.' Therefore whoever says remainder says excess. 'This excess in art and in thought denies the evidence of the given, excavates the readable,' and shows 'that all is not said, written or presented.'[143]

Looking for what one does not see at a first glance, taking notice of the shadow, opening oneself up to the 'felt differences' in a work – might these serve as ways of keeping sight of oneself and the other, as Virilio advocated? Virilio and Baudrillard suggested that embracing and extending the telematic possibilities of contemporary culture had left us vulnerable to absorption into a network, sacrificing self-conscious awareness and self-presence. Derrida and Perniola argued, in contrast, that we ought to give consideration to

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[140] Mario Perniola, *Art and Its Shadow*, 2000, trans. Massimo Verdicchio, Continuum, (London and New York: 2004) p. xvi
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Perniola, *Art and Its Shadow*, 62-3 citing Jean-François Lyotard, Foreword in Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After (Collected Writings, 1966-1990)*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991) 16

the invisible that stalks the visible if we want to 'excavate the readable' and let spectres speak.

Chapter 6
The Permeable Boundary

In this chapter, I look in more detail at works by Hiller and Hatoum, and in particular, their mechanical spectacles, *Magic Lantern*, 1987, (fig. 6.1) and *Light Sentence*, 1992, (figs. 5.2 and 6.17). As we will see, the testimony of these artists affirms their attraction to minimalism, not only as an appealing set of forms, but also as a direct, yet complex, conceptual language that they might deploy in order to communicate their own philosophical programmes. I indicated in the last chapter that quotations of minimalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s were far from unusual - though the quality of artists' engagement with their minimalist inheritance varied greatly, there are nevertheless a number of practices I might have considered here. The reason that I wish to focus on these Hiller and Hatoum in particular is that they were instrumental in redirecting my attention to the formal and philosophical ghosts in Judd's works, and in prompting me to develop the spectacular themes and spectral methodology of the thesis as a whole. The ghostly shadows in these key works are palpable – the *revenant* even makes a tangible appearance in *Magic Lantern* — and rather than seeking to circumvent the supposedly dubious seductive qualities of spectacle, both artists' practices make direct reference to the history of spectacle in its popular forms. In addition, closer consideration of these practices will reveal connections to Judd's minimalism that go beyond obvious formal resemblance, and suggest other affinities. Hiller has an interest in simultaneous permeability and reflection, and, I will argue, develops her own brand of polarity and opposition. Hatoum's specific, serial forms generate suggestive and undecideable images, which crowd out the scope for figurative metaphor. These affinities allow me to introduce further philosophical referents from the 1960s, in the form of Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*, and Eco's *Poetics of the Open Work*, which will circle back and provide added context for Judd's own philosophical activity.

First, by way of introduction to these case studies, I will briefly consider the appearance of spectacle as an overt theme in Hiller and Hatoum. The term first referred to circuses

and theatrical presentations (technically impressive ones in particular), and later, it was applied to the optical entertainments of the late 19th century and the feats of cinema in the 20th. 'Spectacle' once had connotations, then, of remarkable illusions and collective spectatorship, and Hiller and Hatoum return to these roots with works that resemble old proto-cinematic entertainments.

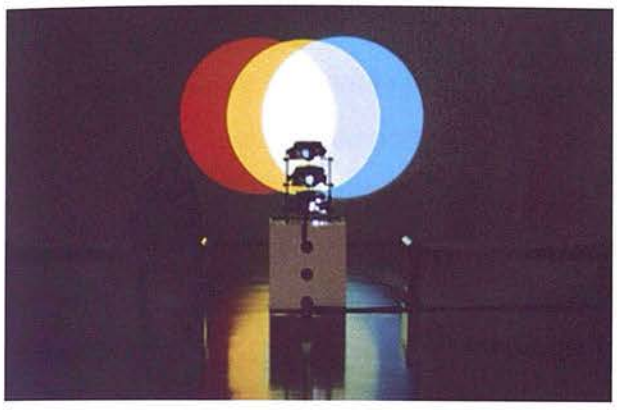

Fig. 6.1 Susan Hiller, *Magic Lantern*, 1987, slide projection with soundtrack, dimensions variable, running time 12 mins

Such associations were incorporated into Debord's definition of the spectacle as collective capitalist illusion, as I discussed in chapter 5, and were thereby branded as complicit in a dematerialized visual regime that led to the degeneration of experience and the deluded attribution of value to mere appearances. Debord's critical attitude towards the spectacle was undoubtedly influential, and the term 'spectacle' has since become a term of critique as much as a description. Today in common parlance, 'spectacle' still refers to something visually impressive or entertaining, and it has also come to be associated with a certain *impoverishment*. Art that is immersive, entertaining and visually attractive is often condemned by high-brow critics as 'merely' spectacular or 'crowd-pleasing'. This is to equate spectacle with kitsch. It is to regard spectacle as vacuous and without substance. But Hiller and Hatoum, in going back to earlier manifestations of the spectacle, show that it can exert a more complex effect than this equation with kitsch implies. Indeed, as we will see, it is the very emptiness of spectacle that makes it so intriguing. These works suggest that there is a distinction to be made between different forms of immersion: between passive absorption and the uncanny feeling of being surrounded.

During the period in which these installations were made, the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a resurgent interest in the themes of vision and visuality amongst critics, which, interestingly, co-incided with the emergence of 'visual culture' as a discipline in universities.[1] Optical techniques and visual philosophies of the previous two centuries provided a frame within which to explore notions of perception, consciousness and intersubjectivity. This critical activity refocused attention upon, and provided context for, visual practices that *addressed* vision, as well as simply entailing it. As Krauss noted in 1988, proto-cinematic devices of the 19th century had tended to generate a 'double effect, of both having the experience and watching oneself have it from the outside.'[2] Such devices had been considered 'particularly interesting', she observed, by surrealists like Max Ernst:

> That experience of the dreamer as witness to the scene of the dream as a stage on which he himself or she herself is acting, so that the dreamer is simultaneously protagonist within and viewer outside the screen of his or her own vision, is the strangely redoubled form of dream visuality that Ernst wants to exploit.[3]

A generation of artists in the late 1980s – those who wished to continue the Conceptualist project but also felt the need for more allusive and poetic fields of reference – turned to this surrealist model, which combined immersion and self-consciousness.

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[1] Between 1987 and 1996, a number of theoretical and historical studies were published addressing the themes of visuality, many of which I have already cited: *Vision and Visuality*, a collection of essays edited by Hal Foster, 1988; *Techniques of the Observer* by Jonathan Crary, 1990; *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century Thought* by Martin Jay, 1993. A related sub-theme at the same time was shadows: *Shadows : the depiction of cast shadows in Western art* by EH Gombrich, 1995; *Shadows and Enlightenment* by Michael Baxandall, also 1995 and *A Short History of the Shadow* by Viktor I Stoichita, published in 1997 but already completed by 1995. Although mostly produced by art historians, these texts addressed the broad concept and experience of visuality within philosophy and culture, rather than in relation to art specifically – an approach possibly adopted in step with the contemporaneous rise of 'visual culture' as an academic discipline. At the same time, various writers were also being invited to bring such historical explorations to light by selecting paintings and drawings for themed exhibitions, and producing well illustrated scholarly 'companion volumes.' Jacques Derrida put together *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* at the Louvre, Paris, in 1991; Ernst Gombrich selected *Shadows: The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art*, for the National Gallery, London, 1995; Marina Warner assembled *The Inner Eye: Art Beyond the Visible* in 1996 for the Hayward Gallery, London, (Susan Hiller produced *Dream Machines* for the same Hayward series in 2000).

[2] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Im/pulse to See', in Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, (New York: The New Press, 1988) 58

[3] Ibid., 58-9

As well as their references to proto-cinematic devices, and to surrealist strategies of 'lucid dreaming', the installations of Hiller and Hatoum share a third term of reference – the Romantic ghost, zombie or doppelganger. Practitioners in human science and the arts in the 19th century had begun to recognise that psychology was made, not given. The ghost motifs of Coleridge, Tennyson, Poe, Shelley and Dickinson were as much about haunting from within as haunting from without. The full implications of this epistemology had only been worked out gradually, culminating, as we have seen, in the structural and poststructural interests of 1960s discourse, and the disconcerting objects of minimalism. By the 1980s, this discourse was well established. There was new enthusiasm for surrealism and a willingness to visualise the phantoms produced by deconstruction *as phantoms*. Hiller and Hatoum helped to shape this context by letting loose the ghosts of 'minimalism.' As we will see, they re-introduced allusions and oneiric associations into the supposedly (but only avowedly) 'blank' space of minimal serialism. They orchestrated scenarios which generated intense sensations and a proliferation of readings. What interpretative approach was appropriate for these forms: literary, metaphorical, allegorical, conceptual? The viewer was faced with the difficulty, not of *finding* meaning, but of accommodating so many meanings at once.

Susan Hiller

Hiller was born in Tallahassee, Florida, USA, in 1940. As a young woman, she wanted to be an artist, but could not see a way to becoming one, and instead studied anthropology. At Smith College, Massachusetts, as she recalled in 1977, she was enthused by the contents of an unused seminar room: early volumes of anthropology papers, glass-fronted cabinets, cardboard boxes with neatly labelled 'shards and projectile points', old photographs of 'dead Smith girls in long dresses holding shovels, frozen in poses representing being caught in the act of digging.' She remembers,

> I loved that room for what it provided me: role models of adventurous women, and a sense of the pioneering, bluestocking days of my college, now degenerated into academic respectability and a merely suburban concept of ideal womanhood; and the look and sense of 'the primitive', artefacts to be touched and smelled,

> works of ancient or exotic origin, objects of mystery; plus, an idea of intellectual community, of scholars united in the decipherment of a puzzle and the quest for enlightenment on the fundamental question, "What is the nature of man?"[4]

As we will see, this early enthusiasm for collecting and deciphering artefacts was to resurface in her works in the 1970s and 80s. Hiller graduated from Smith in 1961, and moved on to do her doctorate at Tulane University, New Orleans in 1965. She found there, to her dismay, that theory was held to be all-important, and that 'a passionate commitment to the values and goals of the people one observed' was 'no longer considered acceptable.' Instead, she recalled, there was an 'uncommitted debate about abstractions – what the American philosopher Charles Pierce called "the comparative morphology of conceptions"' that she found 'depressingly alienating.'[5] After a period of confusion, Hiller rediscovered the pleasure of drawing, and at that point 'determined to find a way to be *inside* all [her] activities.'[6]

After spending time in Paris and elsewhere in Europe, Hiller eventually settled in England in 1973. From the outset, Hiller's art addressed the collective formulation of myths and languages, and focussed on the individual's experience of meaning as it is developed within these structures. Her early 'group investigations' projects explored activities like dreaming, telepathy, community rituals.[7] Invited participants took part in these investigations, and in some sense, took the role of audience as well. Alongside these collaborative works, Hiller was experimenting with automatism. Out of this evolved *Sisters of Menon*, 1972-9 (fig. 6.2): pages of automatic typing, writing, and

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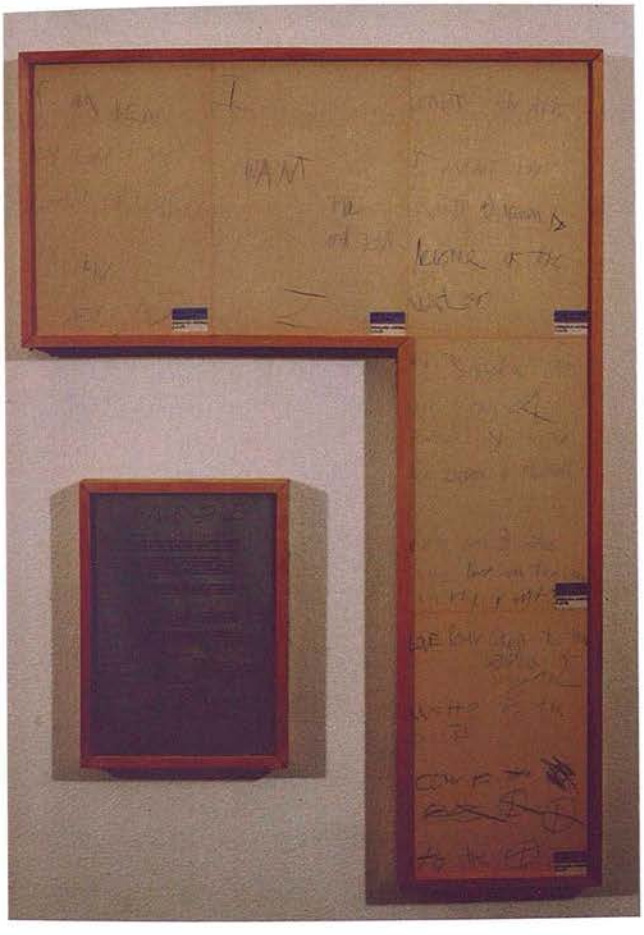
[4] Susan Hiller, 'Art and anthropology/Anthropology and art' paper given at Oxford University, May 1977, repr. Barbara Einzig, ed., *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 17

[5] Ibid., 17-18

[6] Ibid., 19

[7] '*Pray/Prayer* (1969) used the new medium of video to record modified behaviour with a selected group. In *Draw Together* (1972), Hiller conducted an exploration of the telepathic transmission of images by producing simultaneous drawings with artists in other countries. For *Street Ceremonies* (1973) the artist and more than 200 invited participants marked the geographical and social boundaries of a London neighbourhood by performing with mirrors at noon and candles at sunset on the autumn equinox.' In *Dream Mapping* (1974) ten participants 'slept outdoors in an area of Hampshire countryside with an unusual occurrence of fairy rings, or circles formed by the marasmius mushroom, chosen because of the myth that if you sleep within one of these circles you can enter fairy-land.' Every morning the participants recorded their dreams using annotation they had developed. *Susan Hiller*, exh. cat., (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1996) 50-2

drawing, arranged and mounted in geometric cross or linear formations. She also produced grid-based arrangements of cultural artefacts that she had been collecting, such as potsherds, postcards, photographic records (see, for instance, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*, 1972-76 (fig 6.3) and *Monument*, 1980-81 (fig. 6.6).



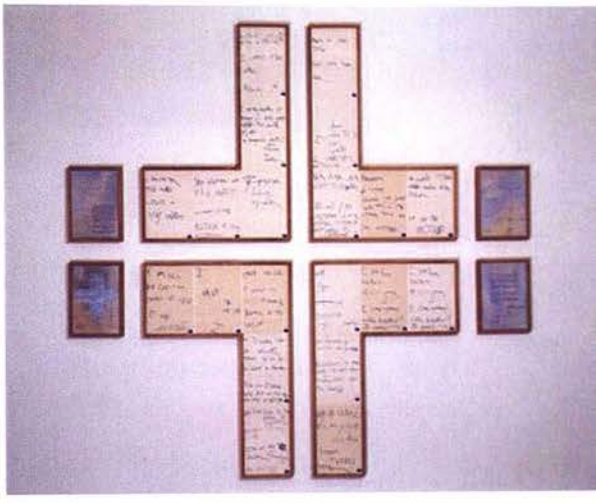
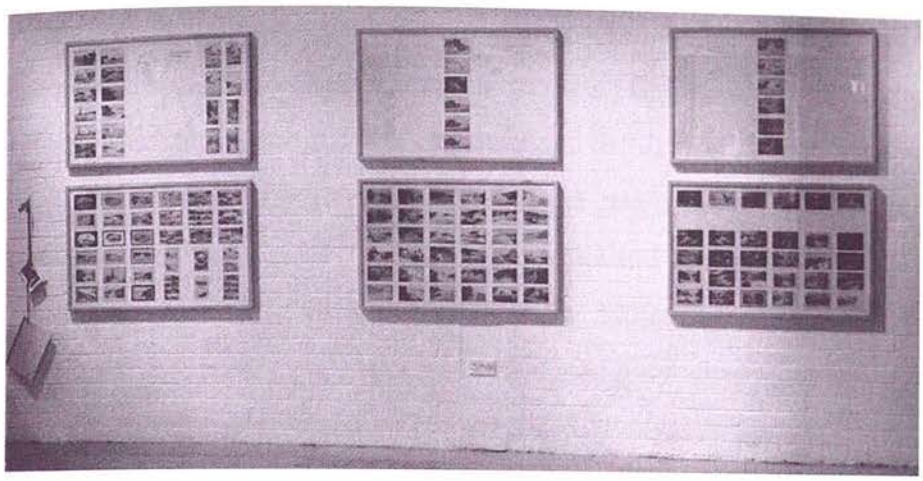


Fig. 6.2 (above and left) Susan Hiller, *Sisters of Menon,* 1972-9
Section I: 4 L-shaped panels, blue pencil on A4 paper with typed labels (1972); section II: 4 panels, typescript and gouache on paper (1979) 91.2 x 64.2 cm, 31.8 x 23 cm



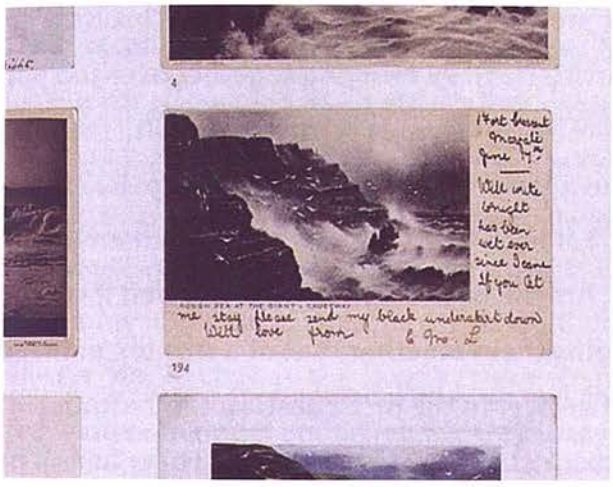


Fig. 6.3 (above and left) Susan Hiller, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists,* 1972-6, postcards, charts, and map mounted on board, books and notes, 14 panels, each 66 x 104.8 cm

However the source material was generated, the principle of organisation in these works (and in most of Hiller's installations to come) was, as far as she was concerned, minimalist in character:

> One of the contradictions I came to perceive very clearly was that my work, while distrusting the whole notion of the rational and objective, had the look of the rational. [...] My origins as an artist are in Minimalism, and I take the minimalist grid to represent a non-hierarchical orderly way of arranging things, so I use it as a basic principle quite often, usually in fact. I'm not interested in aesthetics, and saying that so often seems to have shocked people, since the work is aesthetic in its own way, almost as a by-product...[8]

[8] Susan Hiller, 'Looking at New Work: an interview with Rozsika Parker' (1983), in *Thinking About Art*, 58

As we saw in chapter 3, the minimalist grid was a form that seemed to offer an objective, categorical/analytical arrangement of artefacts. By levelling everything it contained, it actually disrupted pre-ordained relations and the theoretical 'systems' of meaning they constituted. Activating the gaps between the grid lines, as Foucault put it, revealed the provisional basis of order. We saw, too, at the end of chapter 3 that Ehrenzweig associated a serial structure with the primary, rather than the secondary process. A grid form invited *scanning*, he argued - it displaced hierarchy rather than reinforcing it. So how did Hiller use what she called her 'basic principle'?

In presenting collections of 'found' artefacts or automatic texts in a grid, she performed a simultaneous combination and juxtaposition. The isomorphic grid form provided the ground for an analytical comparison of its contents. The contents, meanwhile, consisted of an accumulation of fragments that attested to lived experiences, memories, psychic anxieties and so on, that could not be wholly accounted for in language or representation. Hiller recalled that at a certain point she realised that the Sisters of Menon scripts

> ... were a fragment and an irrational production; you could spend your life interpreting it but you wouldn't get anywhere. It was a question of accepting this production as a drawing as well as an utterance.[9]

Might we draw a comparison, then, between Hiller's automatic writings and Johns' coloured words in *False Start* (fig. 3.3), which, as Judd pointed out, referred to different colours depending on whether they were seen or read? There certainly seem to be grounds to suggest that Hiller cultivated her own version of Judd's 'polarity and alliance': in the writing/drawing juxtaposition of her marks, and in the contained visible form versus the invisible, unbound content of her grids. Gradually, in the 1980s, the act of juxtaposition was made more overt. Repetitive, primitive-seeming interjections were used to punctuate orderly presentations. Hiller included elements of improvised chanting on soundtracks to *Monument*, and she scratched veils of automatic marks on top of her photomat self-portraits, for instance in the *Lucid Dreams* series, 1983 (fig 6.4). Such

[9] Susan Hiller, 'Beyond Control' interview with Stuart Morgan, *Susan Hiller*, 42

works interrogated the boundaries between life and death, so-called fact and fiction, waking life and dreams, culture and nature, and so on.

Fig. 6.4 Susan Hiller, *Lucid Dreams II,* 1983, drawing ink on colour photographs on board, 4 panels 55.5 x 45.5 cm

Like other conceptual artists in the late 1960s, Hiller adopted minimalism as the presentational basis of a semiotic and hermeneutic enquiry; but she also took advantage, as Hatoum was to do, of the phenomenological complexity of the grid and other serial forms. In her topological presentations of found cultural objects and her experiments in automatic writing, Hiller posited fragments, in which what was *missing* was as important as what was there. In order to approach the mysterious gap at the heart of these enquiries, one was as likely to draw on memory, association and intuition, as 'rational' interpretation. Bringing together rational enquiry with psychic drama and desire, Hiller offered the audience what one might call a series of 'double takes'.

Double take

To examine a literal picturing of the 'double take', consider Hiller's photomat portraits. She started making these self-portraits in 1969. With their filmstrip arrangement, and their close-cropped framing, Hiller was attracted to the 'filmic and episodic' aspects of such images. By 1983, she came to associate them with the fragmentary images of a dream:

> The work is clearly positioned in the waking world, since the pieces start off with photomat portraiture, but it uses the disconnected and fragmented images produced automatically by these machines as analogies for the kind of dream images we all know, for instance suddenly catching a glimpse of oneself from the back. It doesn't seem accidental that the machines produce this kind of image, because, as I have been saying for years about popular, disposable imagery, there's something there beyond the obvious, which is why it is worth using in art. Maybe it's the way this kind of photobooth image emphasizes the frame, the way the image is quite constrained by the frame or the way the frame cuts it out of its context.[10]

Upon these mechanically produced images of herself (occasionally with closed eyes, a turned back, and/or a curtain drawn across the body), Hiller accumulated further layers on top of the original layer of photographic emulsion - flat opaque layers of colours and translucent skeins of automatic script-like markings. Like reflections on the surface of water, these layers partially obscured the images that lay beneath or behind them. At the

[10] Hiller, 'Looking at New Work', 56

moment the figure in the photograph was obscured from view, the artist effectively re-appeared as a ghost. By virtue of a single gesture of 'deformation', the artist was seen to intervene in the presentation of her own image. But like the ghost of Hamlet's father, who refused to speak to Horatio, the artist appeared only in order to frustrate the viewer's desire for direct communication. Jean Fisher, writing about the Midnight Series (fig 6.5), observed that

> The facial features, stained with coloured markers, possess the androgyny of painted angels, the eyes closed in ambiguous gesture: sleep, death, trance, or ecstasy? The sitter therefore seems withdrawn into herself, strangely uninterested in the presence of the mirror/camera and resistant to the desire for reciprocal self-affirmation through the exchange of gazes.[11]

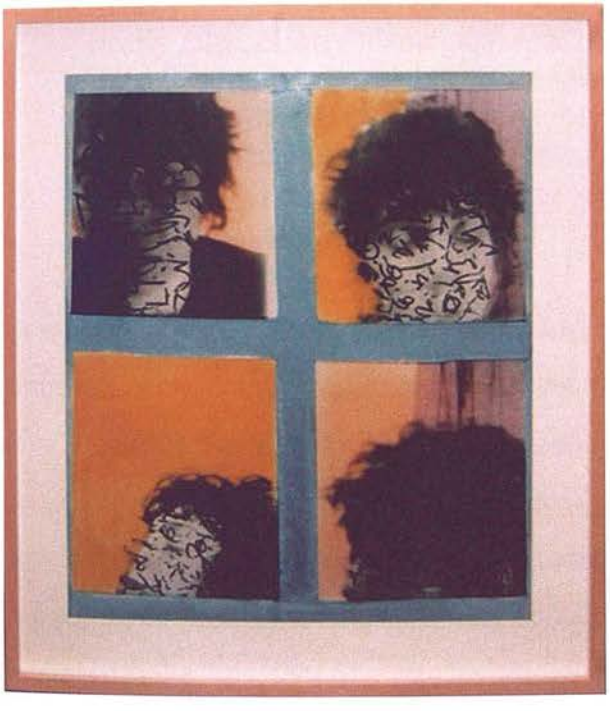


Fig. 6.5 Susan Hiller, *Midnight, (Euston)*, 1982, c-type photograph, 61 x 50.8 cm

There is an echo here of the critical observation, which I examined in chapter 4, that minimalist objects were in some way secretive, they resisted the viewer's desire for an exchange. Hiller *pictured* that resistance: as the subject of the photographs, she assumed

[11] Jean Fisher, 'Susan Hiller: Élan and other Evocations,' in Catherine de Zegher (ed.), *Inside the Visible: an elliptical traverse of the twentieth century art in, of and from, the feminine*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) 257

the inward focus of a minimal object, while as the artist she framed and marked such introspection for the viewer. In so doing she provoked a double take: one the one hand, one sought immersion in a circuit of exchange, and on the other, one became aware of one's precarious position in that circuit.

Hiller developed this strategy, contrasting and combining immersion with glimpses of critical distance, as a response to the problems she had found in anthropology in the early 1960s. In 1988, Hiller remembered the 'lack of fit between lived experience and theory.'[12] The alienation still bothered her, she said.

> This alienation is already encoded by the split term participant/observer, which implies in some way that I have never been able to understand, the object of enquiry is separate from the enquiring subject. From my perspective, this is a clearly false, clearly ideological split, that creates a hierarchy which locates embodied knowledge and the contradictions of lived experience 'below' the abstractions of overarching theory. My decision, more than twenty years ago, to become an artist was because I wished to avoid or relinquish the suffering as well as the benefits that result from accepting such distancing, alienating, hierarchical modes of translating experience.[13]

As we have seen, by the late 1980s Hiller had developed a practice which furthered her desire to liberate 'embodied knowledge' and 'the contradictions of lived experience' from hierarchical inferiority. Hiller's dual role in the photomat portraits – as introspective dreamer and active self – provided an important counter-model to the detached observer. She often cited the paradigm of William Blake's 'awakened dreamer' as a prototype: 'a functioning visionary collaborating with the culture, confronting social control with the "mystery of everyday things and thoughts,"'[14] Like Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, Hiller suggested that we ought to foster this productive state, straddling dreams and wakefulness:

> I'm suggesting that we acknowledge some perspectives of the dreamer, perspectives that are undermined as one speaks, in that, as a dreamer, you can be

[12] Susan Hiller, 'Theory and Art', edited transcript of an improvised lecture to students at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, May 1988, *Thinking About Art,* 103
[13] Ibid., 103-4
[14] Lucy Lippard, preface, *Thinking About Art*, xviii, quoting a personal communication from Susan Hiller.

> simultaneously the protagonist of the dream and the viewer watching the action on the screen of the dream. It's the sensation of being both inside and outside thought, of thought being both inside and outside one, this double vision.[15]

Fracturing the process of reflection

In chapter 4 I argued that the anti-illusionism debate was implicitly underpinned by the search for a way of being both inside and outside one's experiences. By the 1980s, this need was being articulated more explicitly. In a 1989 lecture entitled 'Reflections', Hiller took issue with the commonly-understood notion of 'reflection':

> [...] the problem with the word reflection, despite the accuracy of the way it gives primacy to the role of the visual in our particular culture's thinking about thinking – the problem with this word is that one somehow imagines a mirror or some other hard, shiny, reflective surface, dark until illuminated from the outside, shining only with borrowed light, exhibiting or reproducing the images of things themselves, which are thus second-hand clearly, and of course, reversed.[16]

As we saw in chapter 5, Baudrillard, too, argued that the 'mirror and scene' could no longer stand as a model of selfhood in the 1980s, saying '...today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network.' The former model was reflective/ reflexive, while the latter was not: 'In place of the reflexive transcendence of mirror and scene, [he argued] there is a nonreflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold – the smooth operational surface of communication.'[17] However, although 'telematic' culture might *appear* to be an 'absolute' space of simulation with no 'psychological dimension,'[18] Hiller argued that this was merely an *illusion* of seamlessness, which did not in fact entail the disappearance of reflexivity. She offered an allegorical image of reflexivity that could accommodate lived experience without reifying it. In contrast to Baudrillard's 'screen', Hiller's image of the self was as a surface that was permeable *and* reflective - a reflecting pool:

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[15] Susan Hiller, 'Reflections', Townsend Lecture delivered at University College London, 1989, *Thinking About Art*, 70
[16] Ibid., 69
[17] Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication*, 126-7
[18] Ibid., 128

> Personally, I always think of reflections as watery, fragmented, or broken images interfering with one another, as in a pool of water that is never entirely still. If the surface of the water in the pool is likened to a mirror, it would have to be a two-way mirror, an interface between the objects which are reflected in it from outside and the objects in the pool, which are seen through it. These two sets of image mingle, disturb each other, making new images as the ripples break and recombine and one's point of view shifts and adjusts. And the surface of the water is not only a reflecting skin but a permeable boundary between two elements or populations.[19]

Hiller's account is strikingly reminiscent of the swimming pool analogy used by Merleau-Ponty to illustrate his idea of the 'flesh of the world.'[20] Here, again, the border between two systems was marked by reflections. For Merleau-Ponty, the shifting reflections on the water and the consequently changing appearance of the pool beneath demonstrated the dynamism of the visible *and* intimated the infinite possibilities of the 'invisible.'[21] For Hiller too, the reflecting pool served as an analogy for thinking and seeing that took account of the mysterious, the disruptive, and the incoherent. She continued, 'this is an emphasis I'd like to place, on the overlapping, the fracturing, the merging, of the process of reflection. For this is the slipping and sliding, the breaking of the whole notion of the referential…'[22] Interestingly, we saw in chapter 3 that Judd's works were said to have a similar effect. Smithson suggested that it was 'impossible to tell what is hanging from what or what is supporting what. Ups are downs and downs are ups.'[23] The more one tried to 'grasp' the surface structure, he claimed, the more 'baffling' it became.[24] Now that reflections in Judd's works are more visible to us, as I discuss further in chapter 8, it is clear that many of Judd's horizontal Plexiglas surfaces can be read in exactly Hiller's terms, as reflecting pools and 'permeable boundaries'. Judd's 'uncanny materiality'[25] and Hiller's mingling of images (pictured literally in the photomat portraits), both served to 'break' the 'referential.' Both brought about the loss

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[19] Hiller, 'Reflections', 69–70.
[20] See chapter 3
[21] See chapter 1
[22] Hiller, 'Reflections', 70
[23] Robert Smithson, 'Donald Judd', 6
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

of the 'tabula' that Foucault described in *The Order of Things* (also discussed in chapter 3), upon which things might be organised and named, the table upon which 'since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.'[26]

It is worth returning, briefly, to Hiller's statement on the subject of the participant/observer split, and her admission that in rejecting 'distancing, alienating and hierarchical modes' she had relinquished 'benefits' as well as 'suffering'. I take it that the loss of a secure and detached position from which to take in and measure the world was to be mourned as well as celebrated. It was exhilarating to depose a myth, Hiller implied, but as the comforts of that myth disappeared, there arose a residual feeling of bereavement. As we saw in chapters 4 and 5, even enthusiastic adherents of the anti-systemic approach in minimalism/literalism and deconstruction acknowledged a lurking melancholic sense of loss. (Indeed, the pursuit of knowledge and creativity has long been associated with melancholia, as Dürer's famous 1514 engraving confirms.) In her photomat portraits and in many other works, Hiller's double vision produces a correspondingly dual sense of exhilarating insight and frustrated desire. Hiller suggested that an artwork was 'a reflective device that shows us what we don't know we know.'[27] It also shows us what we don't know and wish we did.

The dead speak

I have discussed the ways in which Hiller used minimal serial form to subvert systemic thinking, and to posit a 'permeable boundary' that might replace the tabula and the mirror. I now want to look at the presence of ghosts in Hiller's work, which seem to render even the boundary between life and death permeable. Although this analysis will take us away from minimalist form, it signals a 'return' of one of its repressed aspects: the sense of 'negative presence.' The ghost is also, of course, an important figure in my methodology of inheritance.

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[26] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii
[27] Hiller, 'Reflections', 71

Addressing the Marxism conference in 1993, Derrida told his audience that he had forgotten the opening words of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* when he had named his lecture 'The Specters of Marx'. When he returned to the book and read the first line: 'A specter is haunting Europe,' he experienced the shock of encountering a *revenant*.[28] Hiller has used the *revenant* most dramatically in some of her installation soundtracks, inspired by the work of the Latvian psychologist, Konstantin Raudive in the 1960s. Raudive made recordings of empty rooms. He became convinced that these recordings, when amplified, revealed the sounds of voices speaking across the static in a variety of languages. He interpreted them as the voices of the dead. For Hiller, between the uncanny experience of hearing the voices and one's rationalising response, there was an undecideable territory, shot through with desire: 'hearing the voices within the soundscape of noise [...] is somewhat a matter of having a wish or desire to hear something, and then trying to make sense of it...'[29] She testified that,

> Personally I heard the voices clearly but was never able to make the jump to supporting the hypothesis that they were the voices of dead people, who were said to have their own broadcasting station, although I've kept an open mind on that.... But there certainly are voices on these tapes, speaking what seem to be words in a weird mix of languages. They are compelling, eerie, and if perhaps their only existence is as electronic artefacts or artefacts of the process of recording and amplification... it really doesn't matter.[30]

Hiller did not attempt to categorise the phenomenon, but instead drew on its potent ambivalence.

Monument (fig. 6.6) consists of 41 photographs of memorial plaques (commemorating Londoners who had died in the act of trying to save the lives of others) displayed on the gallery wall, with a park bench placed in front of them. This arrangement emulated the scene wherein Hiller first came across the plaques in a London park, with people lunching in front of them, oblivious to their message. It was only when Hiller began

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[28] Derrida, *Specters*, 4
[29] Susan Hiller interview with Mary Horlock, *Paletten*, Stockholm, July 17 2001, repr., www.susanhiller.org
[30] Ibid.

photographing them that the lunchers noticed the plaques, 'as if for the first time' – a kind of echo of Raudive's process of turning up the volume.

> When I returned [to photograph the plaques] there were people sitting on park benches in front of them eating their lunches, who turned around over their shoulders to look, as if for the first time, at what I was photographing. And when they had seen the plaques they said things like 'Oh! Isn't it sad? Isn't it dreadful?' But what struck me was that they had sat in front of these perfectly visible objects for years and years, and the objects had been, literally, invisible.[31]

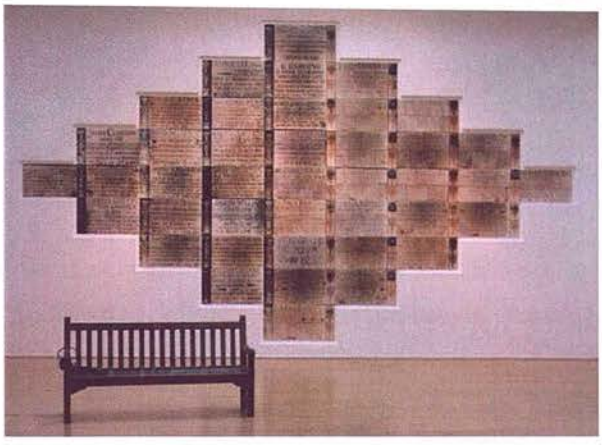

Fig. 6.6 Susan Hiller, *Monument,* 1980-81, c-type photographs, soundtrack and park bench, overall dimensions: 381 x 546 cm; soundtrack: 14 mins 23 secs; Tate Gallery, purchased 1994; photo Dave Lambert and Mark Heathcote

Sitting on the bench in the installation, in view of other spectators, the viewer listens to the artist's voice on a set of headphones, musing 'on the ideology of memory, the history of time, the "fixing" of representation.'[32]

> If the world is always being constructed through language, [the voice declares] then what is "out there" is the same as what is "inside." This is how the dead speak to us and through us. We speak their language. They are speaking when we speak.[33]

Derrida argued that all that we experience is filtered through an inheritance, Hiller suggested that the dead come alive *in* us. The ghostly voices in Raudive's rooms cannot be heard at the time of their supposed speaking, but only at a 'future' time when the tape's volume is amplified. In the same vein, the artist's voice on the soundtrack informs

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[31] Hiller, *Susan Hiller*, 77
[32] Susan Hiller, cited by Lippard, *Thinking About Art*, xvi
[33] From the soundtrack to Monument, cited by Lippard, xvi

us that she is speaking to us from our own 'past'. Hiller's voice, the Raudive voices, and indeed *all* recordings, 'begin by coming back,' as Derrida would say.

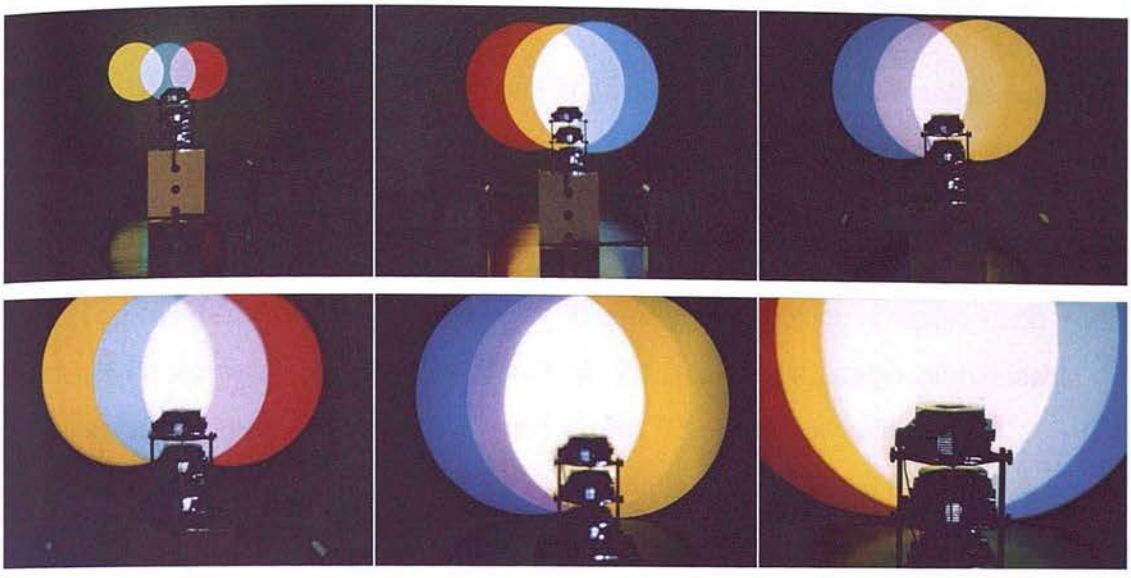

Fig. 6.7 Susan Hiller, *Magic Lantern,* 1987, slide projection with soundtrack, dimensions variable, running time 12 mins

On the soundtrack in Hiller's *Magic Lantern* (fig 6.7), the Raudive voices are featured 'in person'. The installation title and its visual component refer to the 17th century optical device invented by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kirchner, which presaged film projection.[34] In place of Kirchner's hovering demons, angels and other religious 'emanations', we see waxing and waning discs of coloured light. These appear at first as minimal, serial forms. Once the viewer puts on the headphones, he or she is addressed by 'ghosts', and these optical forms acquire a whole new character. The slow appearance and disappearance of the circles come to seem like entities 'emerging' from and 'receding' into nothingness, like figures in the mist, or ghosts in darkness. 'Falsifying' one's original impression of an abstract demonstration, the discs take on a narrative/allegorical filmic quality instead. (This unexpected turn of events, which causes a radical shift in interpretation half way through the experience, is reminiscent of one of Judd's surprises, discussed in chapters 4 and 8). Together the three slide projectors create composite images - colours that don't exist independently on any of the

[34] See Jonathan Crary's account of Athanasius Kirchner's *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae,* (1671) in Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 33

individual slides. Echoing Goethe's experiments with the *camera obscura*,[35] the eye also sees further complementary and retinal colours that don't exist 'out there' at all. They are - literally - phantoms.

The soundtrack features the original phonographic publication of the Raudive recordings, complete with a woman's commentary calmly explaining (or suggesting) what one is about to hear. Then, in a blast of static, voices are discernible intoning words and names - 'James Joyce,' 'Winston Churchill'. Ostensibly for the sake of clarity, each roar of noise is repeated several times. This gives an uncanny impression of urgency and insistence on the part of the 'departed', as if they were trying to bridge unimaginable distances and overcome atmospheric interference. The poignantly elusive 'communication' from the dead is, of course, a staple feature of mediumistic entertainment. The encounter with an enigmatically fragmented message accentuates the melancholy I mentioned earlier, which arises when fixed and defined separations between things are breached, and the ground of secure knowledge opens up beneath us. Yet in spite of fright and frustration, we stand to gain something if we can emulate the Derrida's unusual scholar who would 'finally be capable, beyond the opposition of presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility.'[36] What are the possibilities of such an address? The final part of my case-study focuses on the poetics of the spectral in Hiller's work and their contribution to certain philosophical discussions originating in the 1960s.

'The horrible inside-outside'

Like the *Sisters of Menon* and other works that incorporate the spectral and the supernatural, the terrible sound of Raudive's voices are open to an allegorical reading. There are numerous literary and filmic references that we could draw on, but one of the most apt comes from *The Poetics of Space* by the French philosopher of science and poetics, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962).[37] Bachelard cited a 1952 prose-poem *L'espace*

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[35] See above, 26
[36] Derrida, *Specters*, 12
[37] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, first published in French as *La poétique de l'espace* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), trans., Maria Jolas, 1964, (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1994)

aux ombres by Henri Michaux (1889-1984). The *ombres*, 'shades' in this context (the word also translates as shadows), attempted to take form, but were dissolved instead into a thunderous noise:

> L'espace, mais vous ne pouvez concevoir, cet horrible en dedans-en dehors qu'est le vrai espace.
> Certaines (ombres) surtout se bandent une dernière fois, font un effort désespéré pour 'être dans leur seul unité.' Mal leur en prend. J'en recontrai une.
> Détruit par châtiment, elle n'était plus qu'un bruit, mais énorme.
> Un monde immense l'entendait encore, mais elle n'était plus, devenue seulement et uniquement un bruit, qui allait rouler encore des siècles mais destiné à s'éteindre complètement, comme si elle n'avait jamais été.

This was translated as :

> SHADE-HAUNTED SPACE
>
> Space, but you cannot even conceive the horrible inside-outside that real space is. Certain (shades) especially, girding their loins one last time, make a desperate effort to 'exist as a single unity.' But they rue the day. I met one. // Destroyed by punishment, it was reduced to a noise, a thunderous noise. An immense world still heard it, but it no longer existed, having become simply and solely a noise, which was to rumble on for centuries longer, but was fated to die out *completely*, as though it had never existed.[38]

Rather than an assertion of paranormal or supernatural activity, Bachelard read Michaux's poem as an existential allegory of the 'inside-outside' dialectic:

> This spirit, this shade, this noise of a shade which, the poet tells us, desires its unity, may be heard on the outside without it being possible to be sure that it is inside. In this 'horrible inside-outside' of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions, within itself, being is slowly digested into nothingness.[39]

It was real space that produced this dialectic, because in real space one had to either *be* or *not be*. The spirit sought to *exist*, but instead it was reduced to noise and eventual nothingness. Michaux's emptied-out shade exemplified the collapse of the boundary between interior space and exterior space. Bachelard continued:

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[38] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 216-7
[39] Ibid., 217

> The center of 'being-there' wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of the possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility... In this ambiguous space, the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and the spirit is drifting.[40]

Michaux's shade could thus be seen as an anticipation of the spectralised self in Debord's 'society of the spectacle' and Baudrillard's 'ecstasy of communication'. With the loss of the boundary between 'intimate' space and 'exterior' space, the 'void', too, was lost (replaced by immanence). This void was described in similar terms to Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible' – it was the 'raw material' of possibility.

How does this analysis bear on our reception of the Raudive voices in *Magic Lantern*? It is true that, on hearing these 'spectres' speaking, one cannot but be spooked by their sudden 'entry' into the world of the living. This creates a momentary collapse of boundaries, an apparent evaporation of real space. For Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), our conception of life is founded on a characterisation of death as being 'elsewhere.' But when death seems to intrude on the 'here,' the conception of 'the world' is called into question:

> That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you [death] – it is now here, jetted, abjected, into 'my' world. Deprived of the world, therefore, I fall in a faint...
>
> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection...is death infecting life. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons us and ends up engulfing us.[41]

We do not see a corpse in Hiller's *Magic Lantern*, but we are nevertheless engulfed by a sound purporting to arise from the dead. Sound is more immersive and intimate than vision, and here it is delivered into the ears of the listener alone, so that normal life continuing in the gallery seems incongruous in its innocence.

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[40] Ibid., 218

[41] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, first published in French as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Editions du Scuil, 1980), this edn., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4

One might imagine that the 'shade-haunted space' of Hiller's installation approached the immanence of Baudrillard's screen and network in depriving us of 'the world', except we know that Hiller was not unduly alarmed by this illusion – in fact, she was intrigued by it. Faced with the evaporation of real space, Hiller's accentuation of the permeable boundary threw into relief the parameters within which such a concept operated in the first place. I now want to look in some detail at Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*, and his argument that 'sense' is predicated on precisely this kind of boundary. I am convinced that Deleuze provides a compelling description of the way that all art generates meaning, but I am particularly interested here in the imagery he shares with Hiller's reflecting pool. I have delayed my discussion of Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* until now in order to draw out this connection, but his argument consolidates many important themes in my thesis. I will explore it at length here so that it will also bring value to my later case-studies.

The Logic of Sense

Deleuze argued that 'in discussing the conditions of truth, we raise ourselves above the true and the false, since a false proposition also has a sense or signification.'[42] If 'sense' is to be understood outside questions of truth and conditions of truth, how does it relate to the proposition?[43] Deleuze asks,

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[42] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, first published in French as *Logique du Sens* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969) this trans., Mark Lester, 1990 (London and New York: Continuum, 2001)18

[43] According to Deleuze there were three distinct relations within a proposition: denotation, manifestation and signification. 'Denotation' was the relation of the proposition to an external thing or 'an external state of affairs' – that is to say, it was the association of words 'with *particular* images *which ought to* "represent" the state of affairs.' Denotation was said to relate to the true and the false, ie 'it is that' or 'it is not that.' (12) 'Manifestation' was the relation of the proposition to 'the person who speaks and expresses himself.' Manifestation made denotation possible, in the sense that it was 'a statement of desires and beliefs which correspond to the proposition.' Deleuze cited Hume, who had noted in relation to cause and effect that 'it is "inference according to the relation" which precedes the relation itself.' That is to say, the desire to denote precedes the denotation. (13) 'Signification' was the relation of the word to '*universal or general* concepts, and [to] syntactic connections to the implications of the concept.' The signification of a proposition could be taken as its *premises*, from which implications and assertions might follow. Unlike denotation, which is a direct assertion of truth/falsehood, signification is an assertion of the '*condition of truth*, the aggregate of conditions under which the proposition "would be" true.' Thus, Deleuze explained, 'The condition of truth is not opposed to the false, but to the absurd; that which is without signification or that which may be neither false nor true.' (14-15) He demonstrated that wherever one started, each of these relations was bound to implicate the others at some point in the processing of proposition – regardless of whether the speaking 'I' is taken to be primary (as was the case in '*parole*') or whether the signified concepts, such as God and the world, were considered primary (as was the case in '*langue*'), 'we are carried along a circle, which is the circle of the proposition.' (17) Deleuze suggested that there was

> Is there something, *aliquid*, which merges neither with the proposition or with the terms of the proposition, nor with the object or with the state of affairs which the proposition denotes, neither with the 'lived,' or representation or mental activity of the person who expresses herself in the proposition, nor with concepts or even signified essences? If there is, sense, or that which is expressed by the proposition, would be irreducible to individual states of affairs, particular images, personal beliefs, and universal or general concepts. The Stoics said it all: neither word nor body, neither sensible representation nor *rational representation*.[44]

'Sense', then, is 'an incorporeal, complex and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres and subsists in the proposition.' Deleuze identified the 'discovery' of sense by the Stoics, and its re-discovery at various times,[45] as reactions against dominant forms of idealism: 'The Stoic discovery presupposed a reversal of Platonism; similarly Ockham's logic reacted against the problems of Universals, and Meinong against Hegelian logic and its lineage.' [46]

Sense, he argued, does not underlie the proposition, awaiting excavation, but rather exists as an event (a singularity) which inheres at the surface of the proposition, an event which the proposition *produces*, in other words. Such an entity is, Deleuze acknowledged, extremely elusive – comparable, indeed, to Lewis Carroll's Snark.

> In truth, the attempt to make this fourth dimension evident is a little like Carroll's Snark hunt. Perhaps the dimension is the hunt itself, and sense is the Snark. It is difficult to respond to those who wish to be satisfied with words, things, images, and ideas. For we may not even say that sense exists in things or in the mind; it has neither physical nor mental existence.[47]

Somewhat like dark matter, sense can only be inferred indirectly, a 'something' that the ordinary dimensions of the proposition do not seem to account for.

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perhaps a (hidden) fourth dimension, '*the expressed*' of the proposition. All page refs: Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*

[44] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 19

[45] 'The discovery was made a second time in the fourteenth century, in Ockham's school, by Gregory of Rimini and Nicholas d'Autrecourt. It was made a third time at the end of the nineteenth century, by the great philosopher and logician Meinong.' Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 20

In a formulation that is of particular interest to our discussion of the permeable boundary, Deleuze described sense as 'the co-existence of two sides without thickness'[48] – the line along which propositions and things meet:

> *Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of its state of affairs*. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things.[49]

Deleuze fleshed out this idea of the boundary between propositions and things, and thus the 'duality' of sense, with further references to work by Carroll (1832-1898), where he noted the frequent mapping of one 'series' of related entities onto another. 'One witnesses the autonomous development of two simultaneous dimensions' in Carroll's poetry, he explained:

> … one referring to denoted objects which are always consumable or recipients of consumption [to be eaten or threatening to eat], the other referring to always expressible meanings or at least to objects which are the bearers of language and sense [spoken or speaking]. These two dimensions converge only in an esoteric word [such as the Snark].[50]

In his analysis, the object series is identified as the 'signified' series, and the language series as the 'signifier' series. The two series communicate by means of what is called a 'paradoxical entity.' That is, by means of 'sense' - this 'two-sided entity, equally present in the signifying and signified series,' operates like a mirror between a thing and its reflection. Recall Hiller's image of 'the surface of the water [that] is not only a reflecting skin but a permeable boundary between two elements or populations.'[51] Hiller used this permeable surface to 'break' the referential. Deleuze used it to locate the production of sense as a singularity. These were two strategies with the same outcome, in other words.

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[48] Ibid., 22
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 26
[51] Hiller, 'Reflections', 70

According to Deleuze, the two-sided entity which circulates in both series, guarantees 'the convergence of the two series which it traverses, but precisely on the condition that it makes them endlessly diverge.'[52] These two series, then

> ...are simultaneous without ever being equal, since the entity has two sides, one of which is always absent from the other. It behooves [*sic*] it therefore to be in excess in the one series which it constitutes as signifying, and lacking in the other which it constitutes as signified: split apart, incomplete by nature or in relation to itself. Its excess always refers to its own lack, and its lack always refers to its excess. But even these determinations are still relative. For that which is in excess in one case is nothing but an extremely mobile *empty place*; and that which is lacking in the other case is a rapidly moving object, an *occupant without a place*, always supernumerary and displaced.[53]

In other words, an excess of signification referred to a lack of substance. (Think of the commodity value of the table in Marx/Derrida discussed in chapter 5: while the use-value of the table was connected to its substance, its exchange-value was conceived as 'spectral', *extra*.) By the same token, a lack of signification gave rise to an excess of materiality. We have seen that, in the case of many minimalist objects, the lack of scope for narrative interpretations produced an autonomous and uncanny materiality – which in turn generated a sense of negative presence. Whether there is an excess of signification or an excess of materiality, a non-spatial realm is conjured up, which seems to interrupt the operation of a dialectic.

Deleuze characterised this structural 'lack' in the signifying chain as an empty square or empty shelf. He cited Alice's visit to the Sheep's shop which was similar to a Snark hunt: however hard she looked, whichever shelf she looked at was always empty, even though the others round about it seemed full to bursting. Even when she looked at the top shelf, the 'thing' she tried to glimpse simply went through the ceiling.[54] Like a ghost passing through walls, the boundary between the signifier and the signified - the point at which the sense of the proposition was expressed - was impossible to perceive directly. Describing 'sense' as a phantom was apt, given the phantom's own role as a transgressor

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[52] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 40
[53] Ibid., 41
[54] Ibid.

of boundaries. Reflected in this characterization, too, was the inert and elusive character of sense. Sense is not a being, Deleuze observed, but an 'extra-being'[55] - useless, neutral, and 'endowed with an inefficacious, impassive and sterile splendor.'[56] Yet, as Deleuze pointed out, 'there is no structure without the empty square, which makes everything function.'[57]

The Pure Game

As we saw in chapter 5, Foster suggested that the various returns of the 1960s to older 'foundational' texts often detected an interest in the way meaning was made. Deleuze was evidently no exception. He suggested in 1969 that Nietzsche and Freud were now prized for their interest in the attributes and mechanisms of 'sense', rather than for their interpretations of it. I cite this passage as length because it seems to me to encapsulate (albeit inadvertently) the philosophically-inflected activity of artists working with minimalist models.

> We no longer ask ourselves whether the "originary meaning" of religion is to be found in a God betrayed by men, or in a man alienated in the image of God. We do not, for example, seek in Nietzsche a prophet of reversal or transcendence. [...] He pursues his discoveries elsewhere, in the aphorism and the poem (where neither God nor man speak), in machines for the production of sense and for the survey of surface. [...] We do not seek in Freud an explorer of human depth and originary sense, but rather the prodigious discoverer of the machinery of the unconscious by means of which sense is produced always as a function of nonsense. And how could we not feel that our freedom and strength reside, not in the divine universal nor in the human personality, but in these singularities which are more to us than we ourselves are, more divine than gods, as they animate concretely poem and aphorism, permanent revolution and partial action?[58]

Can we see this as an expression of the aims of Judd, Hiller and Hatoum? For Deleuze, 'making sense' was no longer a question of aligning oneself with theory's abstractions, indeed, it was quite the opposite: 'Today's task is to make the empty square circulate and

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[55] Ibid., 21
[56] Ibid., 20
[57] Ibid., 51
[58] Ibid., 72

to make pre-individual and nonpersonal singularities speak – in short to produce sense.'[59] How was this done, according to Deleuze? He looked to Nietzsche's notion of the 'ideal game' for a demonstration.

Familiar forms of game with their rules and outcomes, were, Deleuze pointed out, a caricature or counterpart to "the moral model of the Good or the Best, the economic model of causes and effects, or of means and ends."[60] A pure game, on the other hand, had no rules - and was therefore incompatible with ordinary games. A pure game, such as might be found in Alice in Wonderland, 'with neither winner nor loser, without responsibility, a game of innocence, a caucus-race, in which skill and chance are no longer distinguishable' could only exist in nonsense terms; and yet this nonsense was, for Deleuze, precisely 'the reality of thought itself and the unconscious of pure thought.'[61] As all nonsense was possible in thought, sense *emerged* from nonsense. The rules of sense had to be imposed upon nonsense.

According to Merleau-Ponty the 'visible' emerged from the 'invisible' (the invisible, we may recall, was 'that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility [...]'[62]). For Deleuze, similarly, a single thought arose out of the unlimited possibilities of thought. It was thus implicitly linked to myriad other assumptions and thoughts (including both sensible and nonsensical ones). Each thought, Deleuze claimed, emitted 'a distribution of singularities.'

> All of these thoughts communicate in one long thought, causing all the forms or figures of the nomadic distribution to correspond to its own displacement, everywhere insinuating chance and ramifying each thought, linking the "once and for all" to "each time" for the sake of "all time." For only thought finds it possible *to affirm all chance and to make chance an object of affirmation.*[63]

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 59
[61] Ibid., 60
[62] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 20. See above, 26
[63] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 60

Just as reflections and shadows gave us a glimpse of the invisible in a scene of global illumination, here, a single thought in a pure game affirmed 'all chance'. To illustrate: in a normal game, chance would enter only at designated points. Two series that were otherwise independent might encounter each other at one such fixed point (a ball being thrown into a rotating roulette wheel, for instance). Once the encounter happened, the now 'mixed series' would usually 'follow a single track'. Unless, that is, a new element of chance intervened: a player blew the ball out of the wheel, say. This new element of chance, while it would achieve nothing in a casino setting, represented a gambit in the sphere of pure game. As Deleuze pointed out, 'To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities.'[64]

For Deleuze, tracking the series of singularities unleashed by a thought, with no regard for moral or economic rules, was only really possible in thought and art:

> If one tries to play this game other than in thought, nothing happens; and if one tries to produce a result other than the work of art, nothing is produced. The game is reserved then for thought and art. In it there is nothing but victories for those who know how to play, that is, how to affirm and ramify chance, instead of dividing it *in order to* dominate it, *in order to* wager, *in order to* win. [65]

Though 'nothing is produced' by the ideal game in art and thought, it could nevertheless disturb real world structures. 'This game, which can only exist in thought and which has no other result than the work of art, is also that by which thought and art are real and disturbing reality, morality, and the economy of the world.'[66]

What the pure game revealed was that every singularity existed in two time dimensions at once - dimensions that Deleuze designated as *Chronos* and *Aion*. Chronos represents the 'always limited present,' while Aion represents the 'essentially unlimited past and future.'[67] Now sometimes it is said that only the present exists – the present is limited, but it is also 'infinite' because it is 'cyclical.' On other occasions, it is said that only past

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[64] Ibid., 53
[65] Ibid., 60
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 61

and future exist – each present can be 'divided into past and future, ad infinitum.'[68] Deleuze concluded that, in fact,

> *...there are two times, one of which is composed only of interlocking presents; the other is constantly composed into elongated past and futures.* [...] One is cyclical, measures out the movement of bodies and depends on the matter which limits and fills it out; the other is a pure straight line at the surface, incorporeal, unlimited, an empty form of time, independent of all matter.[69]

Remembering that 'the event is sense itself'[70] the status of a singular event in terms of time is the same as the status of the paradoxical entity in the relation to the signifier and signified: the event resides in both time dimensions, and advances in both directions at once, 'being the perpetual object of a double question':

> What is going to happen? What has just happened? The agonizing aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening. [...] It is in this sense that events are *signs*.

Deleuze reasoned that Aion was thus the 'ideal player of the game' in that it, too, was 'an infused and ramified chance.'[71] To return to the casino analogy, now admixed with Carroll's absurdist combinations,

> [Aion] plays or is played on at least two tables, or at the border of two tables. There, it traces its straight and bisecting line. It gathers together and distributes over its entire length the singularities corresponding to both. The two tables or series are like the sky and the earth, propositions and things, expressions and consumptions. Carroll would say that they are the multiplication table and the dinner table. The Aion is precisely the border of the two, the straight line which separates them; but it is also the plain surface which connects them, an impenetrable window or glass.[72]

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[68] Ibid., 62
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 22
[71] Ibid., 64
[72] Ibid.

It is very tempting to think of the surface of Judd's pink Plexiglas box in this context – it is hard and crystalline, yet it accommodates wheeling reflections, and allows visual access to the inside. It is the border between two 'tables': between fixed material and fluid illusion. Smithson wrote in 1966, that 'the concealed surfaces in some of Judd's works are hideouts for time.'[73] He suggested that 'Time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated by [...] artists [such as Judd, Morris, LeWitt, and Flavin]; this displacement allows the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures *or both combined.*'[74]

A singular event was experienced in the *now*, but inflected by its position in the Aion. Deleuze argued that a proposition was shaped by its dichotomous structures, its pairs of corresponding, but distinct, tables: denotation and signification, truth and falsity. 'Sense' was construed as a singularity, an event that marked the boundary between a pair of tables. It touched both, but was part of neither. Both proposition and artwork were, in this regard, *haunted* by the sense they produced. Deleuze argued that the ghostly dimension of sense was revealed by 'empiricism,' and this is where I make a further connection with Hiller and Judd:

> The logic of sense is inspired in its entirety by empiricism. Only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimensions of the visible without falling into Ideas, and how to track down, invoke, and perhaps produce a phantom at the limit of a lengthened or unfolded experience.[75]

Hiller and Judd's empiricism was of exactly this genre. Their works go beyond the visible without capitulating to abstract Ideas. They unfold the contradiction between 'illusion' and 'materiality' by accommodating both - juxtaposing them in a suspended relationship. We have seen is this often gives rise to phantoms, which, because they are 'not there', offer a glimpse of Bachelard's 'realm of possibility', Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible', Deleuze's 'Aion'.

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[73] Smithson, 'Entropy', 11
[74] Ibid., (my emphasis)
[75] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 20

Hesitation

I want to finish my case-study with more detail about how Hiller's works have created a suspended relationship between supernatural and rational. Hiller's interest in the uncanny effect of aural narrations culminated in sound installations, such as *Witness*, 2000 (fig. 6.8) and *Clinic*, 2004, where multiple voices recounted, respectively, UFO sightings and near death experiences.

Fig. 6.8 Susan Hiller, *Witness*, 2000, audio-sculpture: 400 speakers, wiring, steel structure, 10 cd players, switching equipment, lights; suspended from ceiling and walls, approx dimensions 700 x 900 cm; commissioned by Artangel, London, with the support of the British Council, the Tate Gallery and the Henry Moore Foundation

Writing about *Witness*, Louise Milne suggested that the 'aesthetic effect' of listening to such voices had less to do with one's belief or otherwise in these testimonies (or in a radio transmission station for the dead in the case of *Magic Lantern*), and more to do with the 'ancestral category: the experience of the fantastic, defined by Todorov as "*hesitation.*"' That is to say: 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.'[76] As Milne points out, the subjects were presented with an array of categorical options: these phenomena 'may be fictional, illusory, or hallucinatory (a somewhat different category); or physically real. If the latter they may be interpreted as man-made, natural, extra-terrestrial or supernatural.'[77] In *Magic Lantern*, too, the listener's intellect struggles to account for the Raudive voices – the *hesitation* arises when one does not know which category to place them in. The Raudive voices are characterised by their 'missing' explanation, which

[76] Louise Milne, 'On the Side of the Angels: Susan Hiller's *Witness* and Other Works,' in *Susan Hiller*, (Roskilde: Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark, 2002) 21, citing Todorov, *The Fantastic* (1970) trans., R. Howard (1973), 25

[77] Ibid., 21

leaves us, like Alice, staring at an empty shelf. The fantastic presents us with a singularity that seems to come directly from the impossible – no longer confined to being an intellectual conceit, the impossible *appears*. Milne continues:

> The sense of hovering on the threshold, unable to choose between competing sets of contexts, strongly characterises our response to these stories: the feeling that "I nearly reached the point of believing…"' Roger Callois, the theorist of play, situates the effect more plainly in the world of signs, evoking Foucault's Order *of Things*: "The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within a changeless everyday reality."[78]

What emerges, for Milne, is the tension between one's desire to form a 'suture', to hold together two different realities (the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the rational and the fantastic), and one's simultaneous hesitation and paradoxical realisation 'that it is not possible to bring them together.'

> The seam will always show, however consciousness tries to stitch it, but the seam is also a doorway into the suspended space of the fantastic, and therefore to be prized as a means of release, whether it is seen as a path to the sublime (a complete absence of figuration), or as a liberation into the repertoire of dreams (absolute figuration).[79]

In *Witness*, the speakers attempt to reconcile conflicting realities, having been plunged into 'terror and shock' and 'cosmic wonder' by their experiences. We hear them, in the re-telling of their stories, stitching up the resultant tear in the fabric of consciousness. In *Magic Lantern*, the haunting is a repetition as well as a rationalisation. It is ostensibly already over - and yet it is also experienced first-hand, as the voices of the dead seem to confront us directly. 'First time *and* repetition,' Derrida said. Subjected to this eruption of abjection, audiences are confronted with the incompatibility of two different realities, and at the same time, they experience the 'hesitation' that Milne describes. But because *Magic Lantern* is an artwork, and we do not have to re-tell, or account for, our experience, we can take advantage of the 'release' into a 'suspended space' of the

[78] Ibid., 21-2 Milne cites Roger Callois, *Au Coeur de Fantastique*, quoted in Todorov, 26
[79] Ibid., 25

fantastic: we do not have to choose between past and present, between true or untrue, between inside and outside, between the sublime or the repertoire of dreams. The work pictures *both*. It represents a polarity *and* an alliance.

Mona Hatoum

Mona Hatoum was born in Beirut in 1952. Under pressure to make a living, she attended a graphic design course at university in Beirut, and worked for two years in advertising, but this was an unhappy experience. So when she was stranded on a visit to England in 1975 by the worsening war in the Lebanon, she took the opportunity to enrol on the Foundation Course at Byam Shaw School of Art, where she began her early formal experimentations with minimalism. In an interview in 1997, Hatoum remembered,

> While I was at Byam Shaw I saw art school as a haven from social and political upheaval. It was a time of formal experimentation for me and I enjoyed every minute of it. I had a very long relationship with minimalism at the time before starting to make work that was more conceptual. The Byam Shaw was a small and friendly place, like a big family with lots of foreign students, so I did not feel like the odd one out. [80]

She went on to attend the Slade from 1979-1981, and was 'politicized' there.

> The Slade was my first encounter with a large institution, and the impersonal, bureaucratic machinery that constitutes the 'institution' was totally foreign to me. I was so much at odds with that environment that I started to examine the reasons why. Getting involved, however briefly, with feminist groups started me on my enquiry about power structures.[81]

At this time, Hatoum moved away from minimalism, and her work became more performative. Her use of electricity (she passed live current through household objects or through water) rendered the works too dangerous to exhibit unsupervised, so she staged them as half-hour 'demonstrations' instead (see fig. 6.10). In more overt 'performance' scenarios, such as *Don't Smile, You're on Camera*, (fig. 6.9), Hatoum used a video camera, turning it on the audience and encroaching on what they supposed to be their

[80] Mona Hatoum, interview with Michael Archer, *Mona Hatoum*, (London: Phaidon, 1997) 10
[81] Ibid.

private space. Members of the public watched themselves becoming protagonists, willing or otherwise, as the footage was relayed live onto screens in front of them. In this particular performance, two naked collaborators filmed each other, out of sight. Hatoum superimposed this footage onto images of clothed audience members, creating the illusion of x-ray vision.

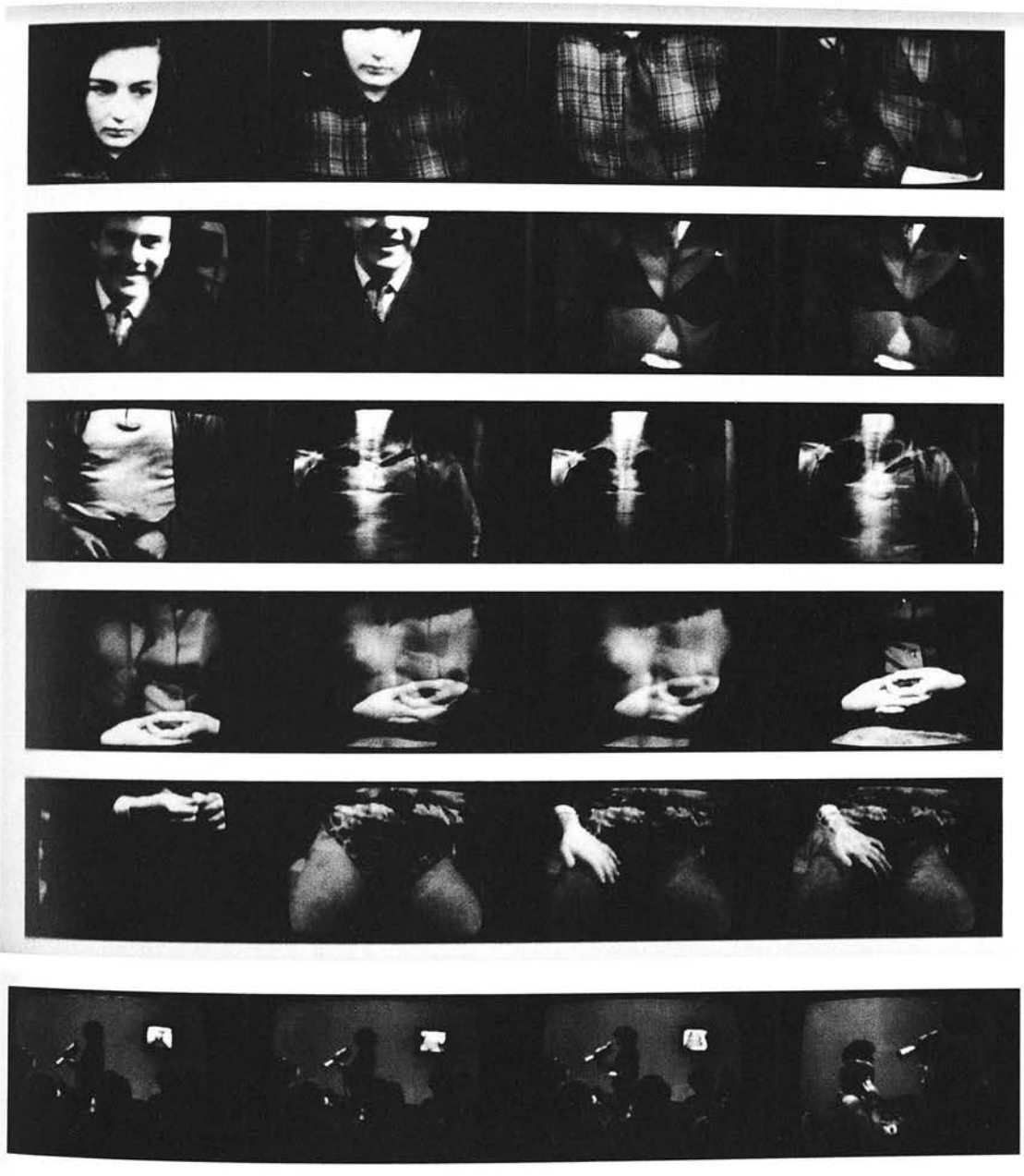

Fig. 6.9 Mona Hatoum, *Don't Smile, You're on Camera,* 1980, 40 min performance with two live video cameras, three monitors, one dissolve unit, x-ray iamges, technical assistant, two live models; Battersea Arts Centre, London

In contrast to the group experimentation with which Hiller was engaged in the same period, Hatoum's works were criticised for being 'aggressive and invasive.'[82] She was, of course, 'trying to make people aware of the fact that we are subjected to some mechanism of surveillance – the invasive look.'[83]

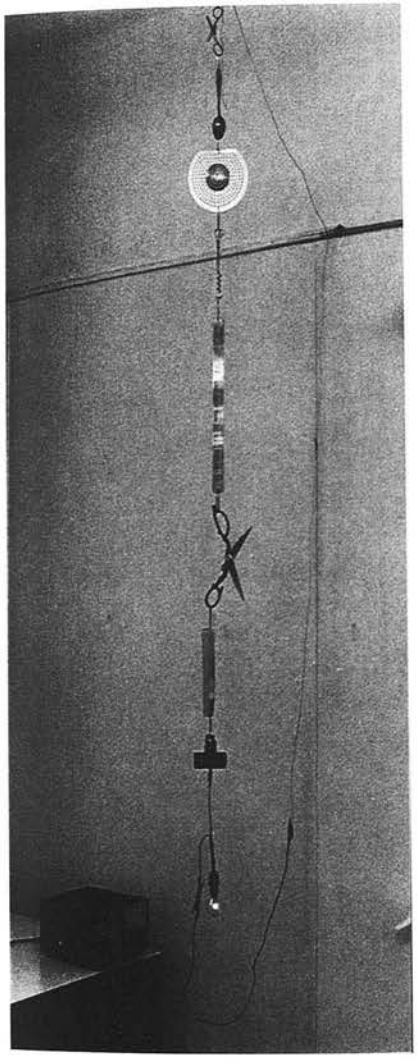

Fig. 6.10 (left) Mona Hatoum, *Untitled,* 1979, scissors, wire, car light bulb, paper clips, metal ruler, drainer, comb, corkscrew, bulldog clip, teaspoon, transformer, 172.5 cm high

Fig. 6.11 (above) Mona Hatoum, *Under Siege,* 1982, 3 hour performance, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth

In the mid 1980s, Hatoum met artist and writer Rasheed Araeen (b.1935).[84] His exploration of cultural difference and theorization of Otherness were 'a revelation' to

[82] Ibid., 12
[83] Ibid.
[84] Araeen grew up in Pakistan, settled in London in 1964, and went on to found *Black Phoenix* in 1989 (which became the influential *Third Text*).

Hatoum.[85] She began integrating aspects of her previous non-art activism into her art practice: producing stark, challenging, performances like *Negotiating Table*, 1983 and *Under Siege*, 1982 (fig 6.11). Looking back ten years later, Hatoum suggested that it was still possible in the mid 1980s 'to make didactic political statements,' but towards the end of that decade, she began to find this way of working unsatisfactory. By 1997, she felt there had been a general shift away from overtly political work:

> 'I think we have gone beyond obvious statements into something perhaps a bit more sophisticated and subtle. Some work of artists I admired in the 1980s – for instance, Barbara Kruger – can look quite dated now. I don't think the language of visual art is the most suitable for presenting clear arguments, let alone for trying to convince, convert or teach.' [86]

She decided that if you present someone with a 'statement', 'once they get it, they either agree with you or dismiss the argument and move on the next thing – no need to look again.[87] She was more interested exploring what else the language of visual art was good for.

In fact, although the artist's act of subjugating herself in performances in the 1970s and 80s was certainly confrontational, the scenarios were always ambiguous. Was it masochism, primitive regression or oppression that kept her 'under siege'? There was scope to consider all three. This important construction of undecideability returned in her sculptural work, as I will show. Nevertheless, Hatoum's return to minimalism marked a shift from the presence of the artist in performance to the powerful negative presence of sculpture. Hatoum dated the beginning of a 'whole new way of working' to *Light at the End*, exhibited in the Showroom, London, in 1989 (fig 6.12):

> With this work I was going back to a minimal aesthetic and working with certain material properties which amplify the concept. The associations with imprisonment, torture and pain were suggested by the physical aspect of the work and the phenomenology of the materials used.[88]

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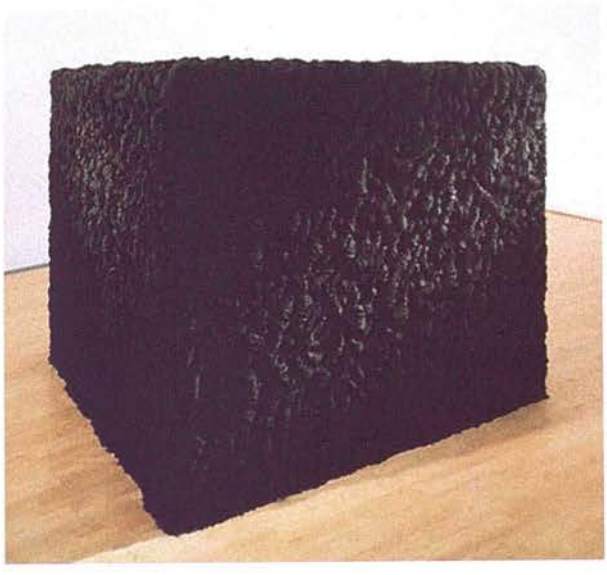
[85] Ibid., 9
[86] Ibid., 13
[87] Ibid., 13
[88] Ibid., 17

Hatoum strategically modified minimalist forms, introducing materials that were sensuous, organic, abject, seductive, strange, repulsive, and/or dangerous. Compared to the apparently 'cool' alienation of 1960s minimalism, Hatoum's minimal works offered physical jeopardy and 'hot' psychic drama (literally, in the case of the heated elements in *Light at the End*, and the other electrified installations that followed).

Fig. 6.12 Mona Hatoum, *Light at the End,* 1989, angle iron frame, six electric heating elements, 166 x 162.5 x 5 cm; installation: The Showroom, London; collection, Arts Council of Great Britain

As well as prompting a visceral response, some sculptures even resembled viscera. In *Socle du Monde*, 1992-93 (fig. 6.13) Hatoum made playful reference to a work by Piero Manzoni (1933-1963): an iron cuboid, which, with its inverted text, purported to be 'a pedestal for the world'. A parallel to Eva Hesse's viral-like infection of the minimal box with rubber tubing in the *Accession* series from 1967 onwards (fig 6.14), Hatoum doubled the dimensions of Manzoni's 'socle' and magnetised it – covering the surface with writhing entrails of iron filings. As she had done in early film performances,

Hatoum continued to confront her audience with their own bodies: arousing a sense of their own physicality at the same time as presenting them with representations of what might actually be inside them – thereby producing a disjunctive simultaneity that recalled Virilio's description of experiencing the moon landing on TV at the same moment that the moon was visible in the sky.



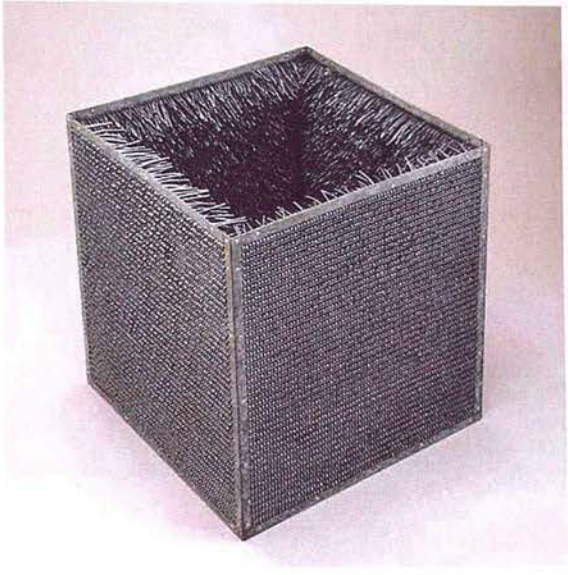


Fig. 6.13 (left) Mona Hatoum, *Socle du Monde,* 1992-3, wooden structure, steel plates, magnets, iron filings, 164 x 200 x 200 cm; collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Fig. 6.14 (right) Eva Hesse, *Accession III,* 1968, Fibreglass and polyester resin with plastic tubing, 76.2 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm; Museum Ludwig, Cologne

This challenge to one's secure proprioception was felt most emphatically in her video installation *Corps étranger*, (fig. 6.15 and 6.16) in which spectators gathered in a narrow circular structure to watch a projection on the floor showing the journey of a camera passing through a body's insides (in fact the artist's own 'foreign body').

Fig. 6.15 Mona Hatoum, images from the video for *Corps étranger,* 1994

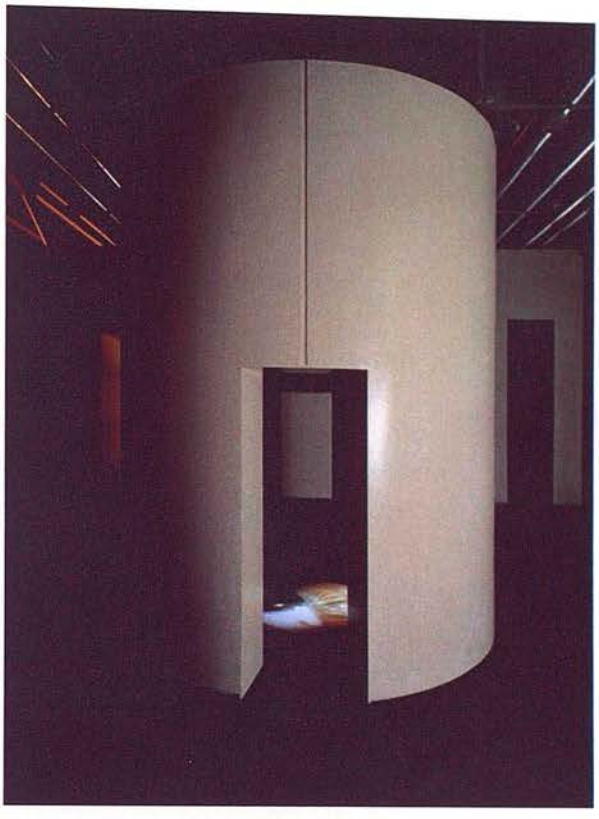


Fig. 6.16 Mona Hatoum, *Corps étranger,* 1994, video installation with cyclindrical wooden structure, video projector, cideo player, four speakers, 350 x 300 x 300 cm; collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

It is clear from these examples that Hatoum's practice in the early to mid 1990s - the heyday of postmodernist 'appropriation' - was a strategic combination of minimalist modular forms, Arte Povera's re-deployment of everyday materials, and a surrealist exploration of bodily boundaries and the psychic drama within.[89] Hatoum's installations were visceral experiences which rooted viewers to the spot, forcing them to contemplate something close to mortal danger, while simultaneously inviting playful speculations about punning titles and forms. What, for Hatoum, were the benefits of this strategy?

A 'Zone of Images'

It is instructive that Hatoum's choice of text for inclusion in her 1997 Phaidon monograph was Manzoni's essay 'For the Discovery of a Zone of Images' (1957). For Manzoni, the successful artwork had 'the totemic value of living myth, without symbolic

[89] In the late 1990s, Hatoum's work became more figurative, as she began to create gigantic versions of household objects. Although this 'Alice in Wonderland' approach continued the themes of psychological and physical discomfiture, Hatoum appeared to move away from the minimalist aesthetic that prompted many of the works made in Cardiff in the early 1990s.

or descriptive dispersion;' it was 'a primary and direct expression.'[90] The new foundations of universal myths, he argued in the late 1950s, were based in psychology, and the artist, he felt, 'must confront these myths and reduce them, by means of amorphous and confused materials, to clear images.'[91] In a statement which arguably anticipated Judd's idea of 'specificity,' Manzoni asserted that

> In this context it is clear that there can be no concern with symbolism and description, memories, misty impressions, of childhood, pictoricism, sentimentalism: all this must be absolutely excluded. So must every hedonistic repetition of arguments that have already been exhausted, since the man who continues to trifle with myths that have already been discovered is an aesthete, and worse.[92]

Manzoni clearly considered the consolidation of myths into clear images to be a process of discovery, not one of illustration. He called for 'Images which are as absolute as possible, which cannot be valued for that which they record, explain and express, but only for that which they are to be.'[93] Hatoum's sculptural works of the early 1990s were a response to this call. They unleashed a flood of ideas, but not ones derived from symbols and figuration. Hatoum claimed that *Light at the End* was 'not so much a representation of something else but the real thing itself.'[94] So how were Hatoum's 'real things' to be interpreted? I will discuss *Light Sentence* in more detail shortly, and show how art historical references, cultural similes and visceral responses intermingle. I argue that this continued the 'minimalist' artists' challenge to criticism, and marked an important contribution to the 'conceptualisation' of more allusive forms of art practice. First, as a way of preparing the ground for this analysis, I consider an essay written by the semiotician and literary theorist, Umberto Eco, in 1962.

'The Poetics of the Open Work'

In his essay, Eco (b. 1932) described a certain tendency in works of modernist literature, music and art to disengage from particular *meaning* in order to open up multiple

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[90] Piero Manzoni, 'For the Discovery of a Zone of Images' (1957), repr., in *Mona Hatoum*, 108
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 109
[93] Ibid., 109
[94] Hatoum, interview with Archer, 17

meanings. He likened reading James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* to listening to postdodecaphonic serial music. The Belgian composer, Henri Pousseur (b. 1929) argued that:

> Since the phenomena [in such compositions] are no longer tied to one another by a term-to-term determination, it is up to the listener to place himself deliberately in the midst of an inexhaustible network of relationships and to choose for himself, so to speak, his own modes of approach, his reference points and his scale, and to endeavour to use as many dimensions as he possibly can at the same time and thus dynamize, multiply and extend to the utmost degree his perceptual faculties.'[95]

Like Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia, the 'open work' brought into view the inexhaustibility of 'relations'. Normative spatio-temporal orders were undermined. As we have seen in Hiller's grid-based works, and as we shall see in *Light Sentence*, the indeterminacy of a work emerged most forcefully when set within a geometrically circumscribed framework. According to Eco, the mathematical relations that underlay Joyce's word games, and later serial music and art, helped to set up an expectation of finitude and clarity that was then dramatically subverted. Furthermore, the use of simple words or images, that were themselves open to many interpretations, served to reconstitute the aesthetic encounter as a playful game – a correlative of the game described by Deleuze. The viewer/reader could juxtapose and combine interpretations, and mentally accommodate different clusters of associations.

> Ambitiously, [Joyce] intends his book [Finnegans Wake] to imply the totality of space and time, of all spaces and all times that are possible. The principal tool for this all-pervading ambiguity is the pun, *calembour*, by which two, three, or even ten different etymological roots are combined in such a way that a single word can set up a knot of different submeanings, each of which in turn co-incides and interrelates with other local allusions, which are themselves 'open' to new configurations and probabilities of interpretation.[96]

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[95] Henri Pousseur, 'La nuova sensibilità musicale', *Incontri musicale* (May 1958), 25, cited in Umberto Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', originally published in Italian in *Opera Aperta* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabri, Bompiani, Sonzogno, 1962), trans. Anna Cancogni, *The Open Work*, (Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989) 10-11

[96] Ibid., 10

Eco, like Manzoni, described a way of working that had 'all the richness of the cosmos itself,' but which also dramatised the fundamental lack of certainty or fixity at the heart of that cosmos. As we can see from the numerous parallels with the philosophical writings of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze that I have discussed at length, such concepts were evidently an ingrained part of the cultural complex of the 1960s. I show shortly that Hatoum, like Hiller, used the structural and phenomenological qualities of 'minimalism' to revisit these issues. Where Hiller's approach could be characterised as predominantly philosophical, Hatoum brought an interesting literary texture to the proceedings, with an exploration of the rhetorical possibilities of the poetic image.

To return momentarily to Bachelard's poetics: in a formulation that recalls Manzoni's 'absolute' images, Bachelard defined the 'poetic image' as concrete, and distinguished it from 'metaphor' which he considered to be generally more vague and hackneyed. He argued that the immediacy and surprise of the 'poetic image' was suited to the disruption of conventional oppositions, such as inside and outside, whereas the tired formula of a familiar 'metaphor' contributed to the ossification of such oppositions:

> Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative.[97]

Bachelard suggested that the play of contrasts between inside and outside (self and object; mind and body etc) had become, or at least was likely to partake of, a normative structure of either-or values. In their place, he called for more concrete, specific, and therefore more surprising, poetic images that would set oscillations in motion and blur the boundaries between binary opposites. This would yield 'countless diversified nuances':

> In any case, inside and outside, as experienced by the imagination, can no longer be taken in their simple reciprocity; consequently, by omitting geometrical references when we speak of the first expressions of being, by choosing more

[97] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 211

concrete, more phenomenologically exact inceptions, we shall come to realise that the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances.[98]

'Diversified nuances'

Let us consider *Light Sentence* (fig 6.17) in these terms. The viewer is liable to engage with the work on a number of intellectual and emotional levels; yet one's cascade of thoughts springs from a single powerful image – a 'distillation' of materials and concepts.

Fig. 6.17 Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence,* 1992, wire mesh lockers, slow moving, motorised light bulb, 198 x 185 x 490 cm; installation: Chapter, Cardiff; collection: Musée nationale d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

The grid structure, the moving lightbulb, and the astonishing immersive veil of moving shadows that results, all coalesce to make a work that is atavistic, direct, and even seems 'magical,' as the writer Guy Brett observes:

> It is a finely balanced situation where a material core becomes a huge mobile drawing, where the centre of the room is a sculptural space and the walls a screen, where we are both optically and bodily affected, all by the simplest means. In the ambiguity between the luminous associations of rational order and a dark, chaotic flux, the artist refrains from giving fixed, immutable values to either, since each is continually being rediscovered inside the other. The capacity of the single lightbulb to work such a transformation is quite magical.[99]

[98] Ibid., 216
[99] Guy Brett, 'Itinerary' in *Mona Hatoum*, 68-9

In fact, as we will see, this humble light bulb takes us from grim torture chambers, to reflections on perspective, from a ghost story, to an existential confrontation of self and the Other.

I described *Light Sentence* as a *distilled* image, like many of Hatoum's works, but it is a distilled image that provokes different registers of response. First, there are the myriad allusions evoked by the title. '*Light Sentence*' could mean a lenient verdict in a courtroom; it is also phonetically close to 'life sentence', with its contrasting connotations of interminable incarceration. Or perhaps it is the light that has been sentenced, and condemned to go up and down *ad infinitum*. Hatoum's play on words signals, like Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, that many meanings are to be found in the work.

The same is true of the sculptural form in the centre of the room. The pre-fabricated cage lockers are used in schools and laboratories - Hatoum simply sourced them from a catalogue. For Guy Brett, this structure conjures 'bureaucratic filing cabinets, the cages of animal experiments, drab mass housing, the fences of internment camps, the lockers of itinerant workers.'[100] Stacked up, with some doors standing open, the cages also evoke half-built tower blocks, overcrowded capsule hotels, post-apocalyptic dwellings. The bare light-bulb recalls bed-sit poverty - the cramped space created between the three walls of the installation might be one of these forlorn dwellings seen in life-size. For an audience immersed in the computer game aesthetic of media coverage in the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, perhaps this installation made the invisible but ever-present threat seem more concrete; the combination of a bare light bulb, an enclosed dark (subterranean-seeming) space, and institutional, multi-purpose furniture, would readily evoke a setting for torture. Some associations, then, preserve life scale and disturbing contemporary associations, while others suggest miniaturisation, and evoke the fantastic shifting scales of Alice or the other worlds visited by Gulliver.

[100] Ibid.

Perspective

The geometric structure of *Light Sentence* lends itself to a consideration of 'perspective'. Take up a position directly opposite the open side of the rectilinear structure, and the two sides 'recede' as steep diagonals. Move around the room, and the angles become more complex, less apparently rational. The varying 'lines of flight' shift according to one's own mobile viewpoint. Now technically, light travels from the scene to the eye, but in diagrammatic representations of perspective, the eye's beam often appears to radiate outwards from the central 'point of view' it delineates. *Light Sentence* draws attention to this ambiguity with a second *allegorical* demonstration of perspective - the literal projection of a beam through a forest of perpendiculars. Three dimensions are transformed into two in front of our eyes, as the sculpture's grid casts a complex linear equivalent on the wall. There are *two* originating 'points of view' in operation simultaneously in *Light Sentence*: the subjective viewer and the objective mechanical light-bulb.

We might relate this to a structural ambiguity in perspective itself, which the Renaissance art historian, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) explored in his 1924-5 book, *Perspective as a Symbolic Form*. Rational perspective assumes that the world has an objective and independent existence, and yet its operation stems from a subjective individual's 'point of view'. To understand a perspectival image, we must hold two images in our minds simultaneously: the image in front of us *and* the diagram that demonstrates how perspective works. We have learned to identify our actual viewing position with the impersonal 'eye' in the diagram. This reading of perspective as implicitly self-reflexive equates with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of vision as self-seeing:

> From the moment I see, my vision must be doubled by a *complementary* vision, or another vision: myself seen from without as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, in the process of considering it from a certain spot.'[101]

We 'see' ourselves seeing, at least in our mind's eye.

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[101] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Iinvisible*, quoted in Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, (1987) trans., John Goodman, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1994) p. 46

There was a further ambiguity in classic perspectivism. Nietzsche protested against its reliance upon a guarantor (if not God, then something like God). The French philosopher of aesthetics, Hubert Damisch (b. 1928), argued that the reference in classic perspectivism to an omniscient onlooker 'guarantees the possibility of disengaging, of switching from one point of view to another.'[102] Nietzsche rejected the idea that our different views were consistent with the guarantor's view, and that therefore an overall unity could be reconstructed from any combination of angles. Instead, as Damisch pointed out, Nietzsche advanced a 'radically different perspectivism' in which 'different points of view are anything but complementary, each one manifesting a divergence.'[103] I would argue that *Light Sentence*, with its two perspectival points of view, one of them in perpetual motion, offers us a Nietzschean scenario of multiple perspectives. The scanning action of the bulb creates strange *mutations* in the lines of shadow rather than a rational redistribution of relations that would arise from engagement and disengagement.

'Tout ce qui brille voit'

Imagining a light bulb as a seeing eye has many precedents. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard referred to the distant light that shines in the window of a hermit's hut as 'symbolic of the man that keeps vigil.'[104] The automony of the imagined man inside was transferred to the light itself - an application of the imaginative conceit that '*Tout ce qui brille voit.* (All that glows, sees).'[105] 'The lamp in the window keeps vigil, therefore it is vigilant,' Bachelard explained. The place that houses the light also 'sees, keeps vigil, vigilantly waits.'[106] For Bachelard, this light was a beacon of humanity. In *Light Sentence*, however, it is not clear if the light is *watching over* us, or more malevolently, *watching* us. In spite of its barely perceptible motion, the light-bulb's *effect* is palpable; due to the disjunction caused by parallax, the shadows' steady shifting upon the wall

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[102] Damisch, *Origin*, 47
[103] Ibid.
[104] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 33
[105] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 34. Bachelard cites Rimbaud, who wrote, 'Nacre voit' (Mother-of-pearl sees).
[106] Ibid.

appears unconnected – as if there is another (*missing*) explanation for their presence. The whole room seems to move, charged with agency, as if it were breathing.

In many respects it is possible to hold the myriad allusions of the installation separate in the mind, and exercise a certain critical distance in their contemplation, but the strange optical power of the shadows threatens to engulf the viewer. In an interesting choice of words, Brett suggests that 'The essence of the spectator's dilemma is confusion between the beneficent and malevolent aspects of one and the same thing...'[107] It is telling that Brett feels the work *bears* him, in some sense, good or ill will. It 'spooks'. The shadows generated by a mechanism in the centre of the room, appear on the walls *behind* the viewer. In a literal echo of Merleau-Ponty's observation about vision, the space behind the viewer is activated, and the possibility of a comfortable or stable position in the scene is placed in doubt.

Here again, we see how Hatoum's artwork re-visits the philosophical preoccupations of the 1960s. In making overt the spectres of the specific object, Hatoum brings to light the way in which these philosophical dilemmas were also functioning in works by Judd and others. In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) explored the sado-masochistic implications of the intersubjective gaze. Sartre suggested that there was one (unreflective) consciousness for experiencing the world directly, and another (reflective) consciousness which had the capacity to contemplate the self. The appearance of another person in a deserted park, or the sound of footsteps outside one's room, was liable to make one suddenly conscious of oneself as an object in the world:

> ... here the self comes to haunt the unreflective consciousness [...] this role which devolved only on the reflective consciousness – the making-present of the self – belongs now to the unreflective consciousness. Only the reflective consciousness has the self directly for an object. The unreflective consciousness does not apprehend the person directly or as its object; the person is presented to consciousness in so far as the person is an object for the other. This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself escaping myself, not in that I am the

[107] Brett, 'Itinerary', 68

> foundation of my own nothingness, but in that I have my foundation outside myself.[108]

This strikes a chord with much of my discussion so far. We have seen that Fried disliked being alienated by the presence of an unseen other, which, he said, was the effect of literalist objects – he felt himself to be 'hollowed out' by them. Later, though, Virilio argued that the more urgent threat was losing reflective consciousness altogether. The loss of the earth as an unchanging foundation (following the discovery of a 'ground above') had led us, he argued, to incorporate the world into ourselves – there was no longer access to an 'outside myself'. Derrida argued that, unpleasant though it might be, being spooked posited a 'third' which offered an exit out of this dialectic.

In Hatoum's works (as in the modernist works described by Manzoni and Eco), we are presented with opportunities for thought as much as artist's propositions. Like Hiller, Hatoum often creates a situation in which we 'hesitate'. It is striking that viewers of *Light Sentence* tend to stay at the periphery of the room. This is only partly to keep the pictorial shadows in view, I suspect. Like Brett, I felt a certain anxiety about the ghostly agency the room had acquired, and was reluctant to enter deeper into the haunted space. Staying relatively still, though, I was able to follow multiple strands of thought as they formed in the mind. Crucially there was an oscillation between what we might call metaphorical and conceptual modes. As Brett suggested, 'each is continually being rediscovered inside the other', so that the avalanche of complex imagery arising from such apparently simple structures put the *process* of generating meaning in the spotlight. As an 'open work' Hatoum's conceptual approach can be re-construed as content, and vice versa. This is a defining aspect of the 'class' or 'sequence' of works that I am setting up in this thesis, and in the next chapter I look at new, 21st century mutations of this sequence.

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[108] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, originally published as *L'Être et le Néant*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), trans., Hazel E Barnes, (London: Routledge, 1969) 260

Chapter 7
Framing Emptiness

In this chapter, I move forward in time to the first decade of this century, and look at installations by the UK artists Tatham and O'Sullivan, and the Belgian artist, de Cock, (in particular: *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions* and *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main*, both 2005, see figs. 5.3 and 5.4). These artists look upon 1960s practice from a greater chronological distance than either Hiller or Hatoum. Forty years on, 'minimalism' has become visible as a specific historical and cultural form. It has also shaped the field of contemporary art practice. It is difficult to make artistic choices that are not, on some level, a response to the legacy of minimalism, which is specific, and at the same time pervasive. We will see that Tatham and O'Sullivan and de Cock make such negotiations a feature of their practice, and bring them into focus. For them, it is less a matter of deploying a minimalist language, than of appraising 'minimalism' and its reception, through their works. We will also see an extension of the aims I have already discussed, in relation to Hiller and Hatoum, as the viewer is again presented with their own processes of making meaning, and order and disorder are brought together in visceral combinations.

Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan

Tatham was born in 1971 in West Yorkshire. She attended Duncan of Jordanstone in Dundee in the early 1990s and then went to Glasgow School of Art to do an MFA in 1993. On that course, she met O'Sullivan, (born in 1967 in Norfolk), who had joined the year before, having graduated from a BA at University of Leeds. They began working collaboratively in 1995. Tatham's PhD at Leeds (awarded in 2004) was supervised by O'Sullivan's old tutor, a former member of *Art and Language*, Terry Atkinson.

From the outset, their collaboration produced works which had particular conceptual ambitions, although these were often disguised or misconstrued. The early piece *I Speak to the Sea and the Sea Speaks back to me, I Speak to the River and the River Speaks back*

to Me, (1995) consisted of two photographic portraits of the artists, each taken by the other, situated in fantastic landscapes (actually carefully-lit posters). There was an intriguing tension between the aura of pastiche arising from the kitsch stereotypical backdrops, and the artists' avowed attempt to 'recapture something from within such representations, to reclaim some authentic transcendental moment.'[1] The artists enjoyed the fact that the work was 'somehow vaguely embarrassing.' They hoped that their 'unashamedly romantic vision,' and 'the apparent, but uncertain sincerity of our expressions,' might arouse suspicion. Had they adopted a subject position that was slightly different from their own? They continued to develop this strategy over the coming years, often designating a semi-fictional space for themselves in the work, and always bracketing the work itself as a meta-critical proposition.

At the beginning, there were some viewers who took their work to be a 'direct' expression of certain concerns, which, as far as the artists were concerned, was a limited view. In a 2006 interview with Susannah Thompson, Tatham recalled,

> ...there was a perception that we were specifically involved in certain areas of content or concerns such as nature, the mystical or the magical and actually we picked these particular areas because they were most potent. They were the most appropriate conduits through which we could negotiate some of these really problematic things about romantic beliefs, about making art, about authorship, about the processes through which art gets made and how it's subsequently interpreted.[2]

Though the formal description of this work does not appear to bear any relation to 'minimalism', there are evidently conceptual affinities. We have seen that raising questions about making art, about authorship and about interpretation were part of the programmes of Judd, Morris, LeWitt and Flavin, (themes which Smithson and Graham developed further). Tatham and O'Sullivan have continued to explore such questions because, they say, there has been a certain loss of faith in the 'rupture' caused by

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[1] Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan quoted in *Volcano*, exhibition guide, Fruitmarket Gallery, 1996
[2] Joanne Tatham, interviewed by Susannah Thompson, 13th September 2006, Glasgow School of Art, repr. *Art and Research*, vol.1, no.1, Winter 2006/07, www.artandresearch.org.uk (no page ref online)

minimalism, and it needs re-iterating, or at least, re-exploring. Although she does not mention minimalism by name, this is how I interpret Tatham's comment, that:

> ...some of the ways we're meant to interpret an art work are limited and tend not to take on board the really great artworks from the last century that made those big moves. There seems to have been a failure, somewhere along the line, to keep applying the sort of shift from a rational or symbolic system in trying to explain or unearth meaning in something.[3]

Like post-structuralist philosophers of the same era, minimalist artists succeeded in undermining the idea of a stable (causal) link between objects and words, and between words and thoughts. As we saw in chapter 3, this had profound implications for the way art solicited interpretation.

1960s 'minimalism' was an important model for Tatham and O'Sullivan in other respects, too. From the outset, they say, they were looking for a way of exploring the languages of contemporary art. This meant looking at the history of art, as many of their peers in the 1990s were doing, but Tatham and O'Sullivan took a more oblique view than some. They wanted to avoid, and indeed, to critique, the 'vacuous and spectacular' recuperation of modernism and minimalism of some of their contemporaries.[4] This is Tatham's view of referencing pre-existing cultural forms for their own sake:

> That kind of fetishization is something that I find quite problematic – it just becomes a celebration [...] its curious how easy it is to see the finding of a particular form as being the purpose of the actual art work. [...] how an artist would bring all these different sources together and what that actually does to how you interpret the form of it or what forces you to reconsider and look at it in another way – those are important questions, rather than just going 'cool, that's a mumming play' which seems slightly unfortunate.[5]

Visualising minimalism through the aesthetic of '1980s film', and the pink and black colouring of 1980s design, enabled Tatham and O'Sullivan to tackle two challenges. The

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[3] Tatham interviewed by Thompson
[4] Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, interviewed by the author at their studio, 21st November 2005
[5] Tatham interviewed by Thompson

first was the 'dryness' of inherited conceptual models, as they saw them.[6] (I explore the beginnings of this strategy in the 2000 installation, *The Glamour*, (fig 7.1 and 7.2) shortly). The second was the spectacularisation of minimalism in contemporary art and culture. Smithson, they said, had had to find a way of dealing with minimalism after it had begun to appear in glossy magazines. Finding themselves in a comparable situation, they often asked themselves, 'What would Robert Smithson do?'[7] Their irreverent modifications of minimalist forms tend to picture and parody this spectacularisation.

Many of the objects Tatham and O'Sullivan have developed since 2000 seem to mimic particular minimalist styles. We see objects in *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions* (fig. 7.5)[8] that resemble Tony Smith's large black monolithic structures, Dan Flavin's neon tubes, Carl Andre's reflective floor and Sol Lewitt's incomplete open cubes, (as well as Brancusi bronzes). It is as if Tatham and O'Sullivan are negotiating their inheritance through 'dressing-up' and role-play: producing a raucously humorous homage that is haunted by pathos. The ghosts of 'minimalism' return, not in their formal restraint and rigour, but as clowns or puppets. Their gawdy awkwardness can be read as a rebuke to the latent classicism, earnest spareness, and restrained tastefulness in minimalism. At the same time, though, as we will see, these characters fulfil a conceptually serious purpose – following the example of the best minimal art in the 1960s, they confront new audiences with the confusing spectacle of 'desemanticization'.

Although minimalism has been 'very important' to Tatham and O'Sullivan, then, in their works, they often appear to 'step outside' a personal commitment to such sources. They adopt a strategy of 'role-play' in order to frame the fact that they are negotiating a position for their practice in relation to art history.[9] Not that this work is entirely self-reflexive - far from it. Like Judd, and the other artists I have been discussing, Tatham

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[6] Tatham and O'Sullivan interviewed by the author.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See below, 259
[9] Ibid.

and O'Sullivan also explore the way their art work participates in the world, and address the processes by which meaning is constructed, as I now show.

The Glamour

The Glamour was first exhibited at the Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Making reference to works by Flavin, Smithson and Morris, it consisted of pink neon tubes strewn across piles of rubble, piled up in front of three floor-to-ceiling mirrored panels. For Tom Morton, 'the raspberry glow' of the lights transformed the scenario from 'minimalist' homage to something else:

> The rubble begins to resemble the crumbly brown softness of expensive lipstick; the flexes on the light fittings surfers' ripcords, or the tails of slumbering, sun-baked beasts. The mirrors become the sky over Venice Beach, or the savannah, or else, (because mirrors can never fully escape their own mythology) the shimmering portals encountered by Narcissus, Merlin or Alice.[10]

Fig. 7.1 (above) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *The Glamour*, 2000, rubble, mirrored sheets, pink fluorescent lights; installation: Transmission Gallery

Fig. 7.2 (left) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *The Glamour*, 2001, mirrored styrene sheets, pink fluorescent lights and barbed wire; installation: Berlin Biennale

[10] Tom Morton, 'Mirror, Mirror' *Frieze*, Issue 87, November-December, 2004, 90

Morton's response puts me in mind of Morris's essay for his 1979 show, *Mirror Works 1961-78*. Though the two texts focused on different reference points, Morton's allusion to the inescapable mythology of mirrors paralleled Morris's discussion of the historical uses of mirror, its recent deployment in Lacan's theories of identity formation, and the 'mileage' that Jean Cocteau and the Marx Brothers had got out of it. As we saw in chapter 4, Morris had come to 'like [the mirror's] hovering connotation of abject narcissism, its reek of the cheaply decorative, its status as a kind of disco-degenerate category.'[11] Clearly, for Morton, *The Glamour* evoked a 1980s equivalent of this glamorous (but faintly tacky) chic. In both cases a mirror's presence brought a cascade of connotations with it, not all high-brow or historical. As I have said, I am concerned with uncovering the *inadvertent* reflections in Judd's work, rather than constructing a mirror theme, *per se*, but it is nevertheless tempting to emulate the spirit of Morris's retrospective self-appraisal, and re-visit Judd's shiny surfaces in the light of an expanded, more 'pop', field of reference. In the next chapter, I consider Smithson's essay 'The Crystal Land', and his evocative description of a road-trip he took with Judd. His account is populated with shiny chrome diners and reflective car surfaces. His imagery offers us plenty of scope to ask whether Judd's works are, themselves, 'glamorous'.

Applied to the iconic forms of 1960s minimalism, the sheen of cheap chic provided by Tatham and O'Sullivan may prove instructive, then; but, as they pointed out,

> There's always more than one meaning. The pink lights in *The Glamour* are Dan Flavin, but then, they're too camp, a backdrop for a seedy nightclub, and in a way they refer to the whole genre of bad art.[12]

Their irreverent and bathetic construal of minimalism was intended to produce not just 'new' readings, but contradictory ones as well. We have seen that Tatham and O' Sullivan were keen to offer their audience a range of subject-positions or attitudes, which they, and we, might take up in relation to their sources. Was *The Glamour* a recuperation of minimalism, a parody of minimalism, or a parody of the *reception* of minimalism?

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[11] Morris, *Mirror Works*, no page ref.
[12] Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, Interview with Will Bradley, Berlin Biennale 2, Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2001

Were the artists sincere, or cynical? In fact, it is most productive to think of the work as encompassing all these positions. Each 'position' takes form as a spectral presence in the fictional/conceptual space surrounding the work. Just as one was liable to 'hesitate' at Hiller's orchestrations of the 'fantastic', and weigh up the myriad possible interpretations of Hatoum's works, so here, one would do well to heed to the multiple voices of Tatham and O'Sullivan's spectres, and bear all these 'possibles' in mind at once.

The title of the installation came from a 1984 novel, *The Glamour*, by Christopher Priest. In her interview with Tatham, Thompson mentions that 'glamour' is a Scots word, which 'seems to refer to shape-shifting creatures or the ability for a creature to be seen as different things by different people.'[13] (In an early version of the novel, the 'glammer' is described as an old enchantment, by which a young man's beloved would be 'glammered' or 'made glamorous' – she would become invisible in, and therefore safe from, the eyes of others.) Tatham told Thompson, 'I really like the rift between that meaning and the more everyday uses we have for the word [...] which is a certain kind of shiny, special-ness, surface-ness.'[14] This focus on surface, she felt, was resonant with their work, in that the 'effect' and the 'feel' of the artwork were central to its 'function' (that is, the perceptual qualities of the work anchored its conceptual propositions). For her,

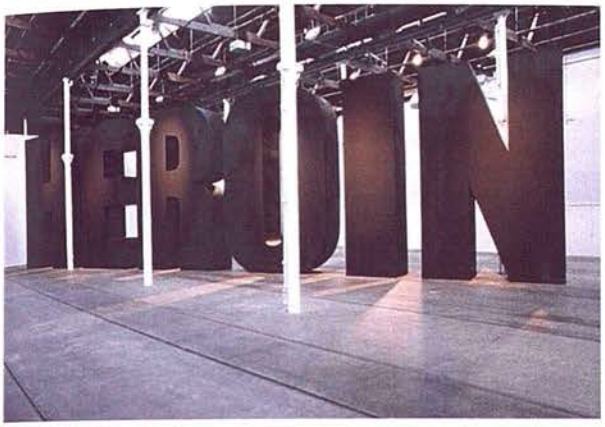
> There's something about the idea of glamour which refers very much to surface and to visuality and it exists as a space that we can comprehend. And it seems a way of nailing a conceptual position in relation to the visual.[15]

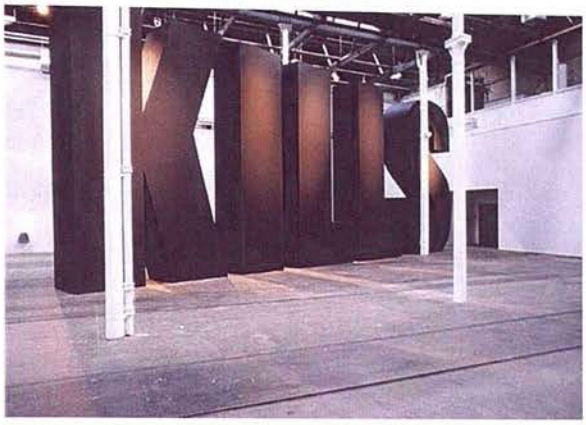
But there is also scope to bring these distinct meanings together: in the idea of being hidden *in plain sight*. In both cases, the 'glamour' works by blinding us to what is really there. We have seen that a shiny surface, or a mirror, disappears – effectively 'dematerialises' itself – the moment a reflected image appears. A reflective surface is like an actor playing a part: an oscillation arises between the real tain and the illusory image, though each can always be made to re-appear with a simple shift of focus. (I

[13] Tatham interviewed by Thompson
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

return to this idea when I come to discuss Judd's stacks in the next chapter.) It is in this sense that Tatham and O'Sullivan's works are 'glamourous' – as indeed are all the case-studies in this thesis – they comprehend the visceral/visible and the conceptual/invisible.

HK





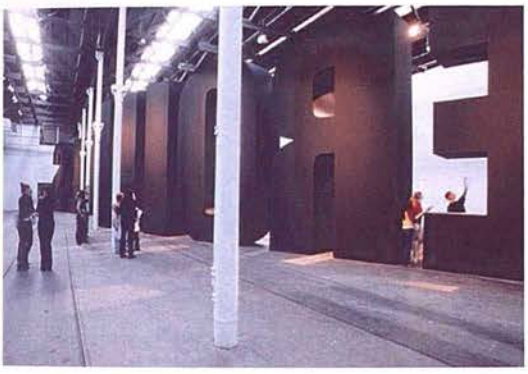


Fig. 7.3 (above) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *HK*, 2001, painted wood; commissioned by Tramway, Glasgow

Fig. 7.4 (left) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *HK*, 2002, showing relation to human scale

When HK was first exhibited in 2001 at the Tramway, Glasgow, audiences were confronted with six-metre high black capital letters spelling out the phrase 'HEROIN KILLS' (figs. 7.3 and 7.4). This gigantic sculpture was accompanied by testimony from heroin users and their families, social workers and project managers in Glasgow, and a critical essay by Lars Bang Larsen. Tatham recalled that 'it was great to be doing something that was 'about' drugs as opposed to being about mystical beings or something.'[16] The message may have seemed unambiguous at first, but, just as in their other installations, the artists' apparently straightforward subject position defied articulation – conflicts came into view as soon as one tried to pin it down. Larsen observed, for instance, that 'heroin kills' was

[16] Ibid.

> ... not a slogan but it sounds like one, like smoking kills, or speed kills. But opacity of meaning succeeds the bombast: How does heroin kill? Does it kill everybody or just a few? Who is telling us? Don't we already know? Why are the letters six meters high? And why complicate the reading of the sculpted words by exhibiting interviews with heroin user, their advisors and families? Or is it the sculpture that complicates the reading of the interviews?[17]

The slogan and the interviews were not united in the service of a clear anti-drugs message, but presented 'in parallel or in contradiction.' The slogan seemed to be an 'evasion'[18] as much as anything; and as one searched for a stable meaning, the search itself emerged as a prominent part of the slogan's impact. 'In the words of the literary theorist Paul de Man, it becomes an allegory of its own reading.'[19] Was this mystification a kind of rebellion against, or at least a questioning of, the instrumental role increasingly expected of artists in Glasgow at this time – the expectation that they ought to work to advance the social good?[20] Certainly, there was an ironic 'side' to the work which suggested Tatham and O'Sullivan were acting 'inappropriately':

> You don't expect irony here. You want art to assume a more responsible stance, not to be testing attitudes to art. To allow for semiotic redundancy in issues that cut to the marrow of the social seems frivolous, flippant in a nihilistic, punk rock sort of way.[21]

Larsen focused on the provocation that 'semiotic redundancy' presented to the audience. An apparent 'failure' of signification was, as we saw in chapter 4, a key component of minimalist objects as they were received in the 1960s, and we will see shortly that Tatham and O'Sullivan's curious objects often emulate, and revel in, this failure. In respect of semiotic redundancy, there is something to be learned from their subversion of the signifying function of words, in particular. In Tatham and O'Sullivan's hands, the

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[17] Lars Bang Larsen, *Heroin Kills*, Tramway and Modern Institute, (Glasgow: 2003) 35
[18] Ibid., 36
[19] Ibid.
[20] Both Tramway and Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) were run by Glasgow City Council. In 2003, GOMA launched its biannual programme of 'social justice' art exhibitions with a group show called 'Sanctuary': 'to respond to and explore the increasing issues surrounding human rights and the growing community of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow.' *Sanctuary: Contemporary Arts and Human Rights*, exh.cat., (Glasgow City Council, 2003) x
[21] Larsen, *Heroin Kills*, 35-6

materiality of the words 'heroin kills' is apparently *in excess*, because it is not satisfactorily sublimated into sign. As we saw in the last chapter, a haunting inevitably ensues from such a situation: the spectres of contradiction and possibility crowd in. Larsen argued that 'Language's resistance [i.e. its materiality] to language's own drift away from the real [i.e. standing for the idea of something else] is what allows HK to simultaneously make contradictory propositions, tragic and redundant, obscure and transparent, overwhelming and insufficient, art and non-art.'[22]

Discourse, Figure

Before considering a similar paradox in objects, I pause to consider Lyotard's discussion of the figure from 1974. According to Lyotard, there are three orders of 'figure': the figure-image, the figure-form and the figure-matrix. The figure-image is the kind of image that appears in hallucinations, dreams, films, and pictures, he argued. It is 'an object situated at a distance, a theme. It is a contour (an outline) and belongs to the visible order.'[23] The figure-form is an underlying form which is present in the visible. It can be seen, 'if need be', but it is not generally noticed. 'It is André Lhote's regulating line, the Gestalt of a configuration, the architecture of painting, the scenography of a performance, the centring of a photograph, in a word, the schema.'[24] The figure-matrix is, in contrast, 'invisible in principle': 'Of all the figural orders it is the most remote from communicability, the most withdrawn. It harbors the incommunicable.'[25] To make a connection with other motifs I have discussed: if a grid arrangement relates to 'figure-form', then the gaps between the grid-lines relate to the 'figure-matrix'.

We know that Lyotard had sympathy with Ehrenzweig's ideas, (he wrote *Discours, Figure* in the same year as his preface to Ehrenzweig's *Hidden Order of Art*) and it helps to bear in mind the latter's characterisation of the primary and secondary processes when considering Lyotard's articulation of the figure-matrix. This matrix gave rise, Lyotard

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[22] Ibid., 37
[23] Jean Francois Lyotard, 'Fiscourse, Digure: The Utopia behind the Scenes of Phantasy' in *Discours, Figure*, (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1974), trans., Mary Lydon, repr., *Theatre Journal*, Vol 35, part 3, 1983, 333
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

argued, to both 'word-presentations' and 'thing-presentations' which disrupted the semantic and representational worlds that they appeared to inhabit. Word-presentations ('verbalizations') ran 'counter to the rules of syntax... and of semantics' – that is, they looked like normal sentences, but were in fact paradoxical, even nonsensical. In one example, Lyotard referred to Freud's 1919 paper, 'A Child Is Being Beaten.' Freud analysed the child's fantasy, that a child was being beaten, as both a projection and an identification. The child took up the roles of observer and protagonist simultaneously. Thus, Lyotard explained, the 'apparent coherence' of this sentence 'conceal[ed] the fact that the life of the psyche contains a multitude of 'sentences' that are mutually exclusive, that cannot possibly co-exist.'[26] That multiple meanings existed in the space of one sentence suggested that it was attributable to the primary, not the secondary process.

Similarly, according to Lyotard, thing-presentations ('phantasmatic images') of the matrix 'hardly represent "things" in the sense of objects recognizably pertaining to the external world. The images the matrix generates are both sharply defined and blurred at the same time.'[27] Lyotard likened a thing-presentation to a multiple photographic exposure, a polyphonic layering, (which recalls, incidentally, Ehrenzweig's description of serial form). As with word-presentations, thing-presentations worked by obscuring their own clarity, and thus illuminating the process by which things usually achieve clarification. For Lyotard 'the capacity to contain several places in one place, to form a bloc out of what cannot possibly co-exist - is the secret of the figural, which transgresses the intervals that constitute discourse and the distances that constitute representation.'[28] The important point he made was that the figural seemed to address vision, but only to flout its attendant expectations. Lyotard went on to say,

> As we pursue the analysis we come up against a density, an opacity: the locus I will assume, of the figural which deconstructs not only discourse but the figure, in as much as the figure is a recognizable image or a regular form.[29]

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[26] Ibid., 343
[27] Ibid., 334
[28] Ibid., 343-4
[29] Ibid., 334

This is an illuminating way of thinking about Tatham and O'Sullivan puzzling objects, as I now show.

Figural figures

In 2005 Tatham and O'Sullivan were commissioned by Jason E Bowman and Rachel Bradley to produce a series of related installations for Scotland's presentation in Venice and at the National Galleries of Scotland. The title of the NGS installation, *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions*, was an amalgamation of previous titles: in 2004 and 2005 Tatham and O'Sullivan also made several pieces entitled *this has reached the limit conditions of its own rhetoric*, (including a drawing, a photograph and a sculpture – see figs. 7.7, 7.8, 7.12) and the companion exhibition in Venice was named *A routine sequence of external actions*. The title texts were themselves 'found', and their presentation here in a 'bricolage' form created a simulacral chain of echoes in which any allusion to an original signified was lost. Where Hatoum's 'Light Sentence' (rather like 'A Child is Being Beaten') seemed to over-flow with signification, 'This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions,' was similarly indefinite, but seemed *emptied out* in comparison.

In the installation itself (fig 7.5), Tatham and O'Sullivan presented an array of objects clustered together in a tableau formation. Resembling a fairground side-show or a stage set, the objects were like props, awaiting an activating rationale. If there was a similarity between Lyotard's idea of the word-presentation and Tatham and O'Sullivan's nonsense titles, their objects, too, could be considered as emanations of the figure-matrix: as thing-presentations. They were *figural* rather than representative: they deconstructed the figure as 'a recognizable image or a regular form'.[30] The stick man and the black wedge may have alluded to human figures but they did not 'stand in' for them in any pictorial sense. The stick man held a diagrammatic posture constructed from right angles, and the black wedge bore the annotation of a face. The effect was mask-like: the illusionistic painted expression on the wedge looked like a white shadow cast on a black surface - a negative of a negative. We expect effigies and dolls to have uncanny vestiges of life about them,

[30] See above, n. 28

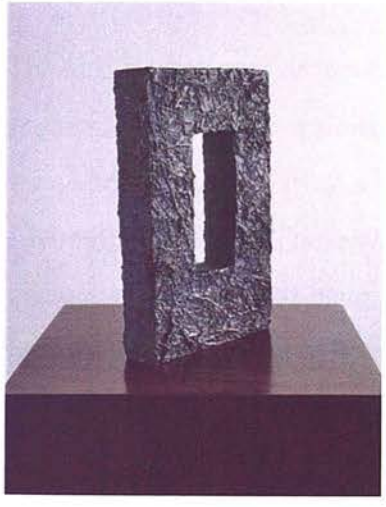
but these figures were a long way from any kind of reality effect or 'uncanny valley.'[31] In their stylised inscrutability and their confrontational yet impassive stance, they resembled the Sphinx (whose posture was indeed parodied by the stick man) or Easter Island heads.

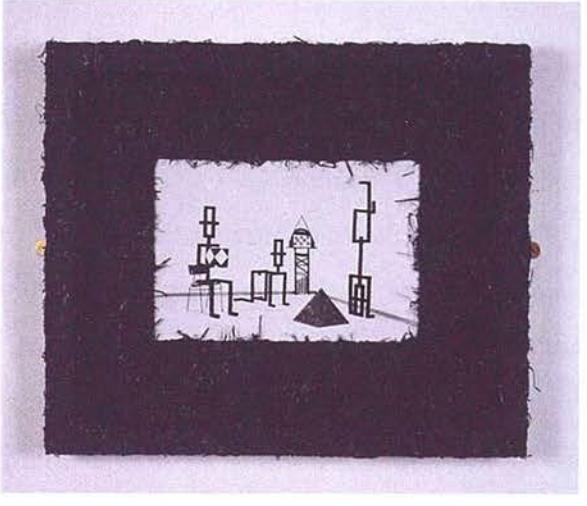
Fig. 7.5 Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions,* 2005, mixed media, including plywood, bronze, walnut, marble, fluorescent lights, barbed wire and mirror tiles; commissioned by National Galleries of Scotland

It was as if Tatham and O'Sullivan took the hidden anthropomorphism of minimalism, and made it overt, while retaining the powerful and puzzling emptiness of those works. They created a collection of enigmatic, slightly alien entities, like the stock figures in Commedia dell'Arte, or indeed, the Yorkshire Mumming Plays, which the pair referenced in their performance, *The Slapstick Mystics with Sticks* (fig. 7.6).

[31] Japanese roboticist Dr Masahiro Mori showed in the 1970s that our positive feelings for a robot or puppet faltered when they became too life-like. He called this drop on the graph of empathy the 'uncanny valley', and it taught animators and robot designers to shy away from extreme realism lest their figures hit the creepy state associated with the zombie or demonic doppelganger.

Fig. 7.6 (left) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *Slapstick Mystics With Sticks*, 2001, performed at *October*, in St Columba Gaelic Church, Glasgow (photo shows the characters *I-Eye* and *Mirror*, inspired by Lacan).
Fig. 7.7 (below left) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *This has reached the limit conditions of its own rhetoric*, 2004, photograph, straw, wood, paint
Fig. 7.8 (below right) Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *This has reached the limit conditions of its own rhetoric (bronze)*, 2004, bronze, wood





Variations of many of the objects in this installation had featured in other works. In spite of their multifarious subject-positions and a diversity of materials, Tatham and O'Sullivan's body of repeated objects contribute to a single 'framework' of practice. They form a *lexicon*.

> By returning to works and going back over them again what we're doing is partly about trying to make more recognisable what it was we were doing the first time, so that the work continues from one work to another. [32]

[32] Tatham interviewed by Thompson

They are an artistic demonstration, in other words, of Kubler's mutating sequence, discussed in chapter 3, in which later works threw new light on earlier ones in the sequence. Like Judd's formal surprises, where the viewer grasps the work only after he or she has explored it from several angles, Tatham suggested that their works come into focus only after more works have been seen by the viewer. I can vouch for this – my first encounter with Tatham and O'Sullivan's work was baffling, the second was intriguing. It was only on seeing a third exhibition that I began to understand that their objects were characters in a wider drama; they were fragments or components, not autonomous objects, or indeed, solitary statements or propositions. I began to understand, in other words, how they 'meant' in relation to each other, and in relation to my activity in trying to interpret them.

The self-quotations, or 'revenants' in *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions* (figs. 7.9, 7.10, 7.11) included the mirrored panels, barbed wire and neon lights from a second staging of *The Glamour* in 2001 for the Berlin Biennale (fig. 7.2). There was also a miniature reprise of 'Heroin Kills'– the lettering, on this occasion, made of black marble. The giant wooden stick man had appeared in other installations and photographs, in various sizes and poses (fig. 7.7). The two wedges in this installation were variations on a recurring pyramid motif, which the artists often painted with pink and black patterns and/or fixed facial expressions. In addition to these repetitions, there were formal echoes – of shape, colour and material. An open oblong shape was used for the head of the stick man, the bronze 'objet' on the plinth, and the 'o' of HEROIN KILLS. This shape was reminiscent of a frame, but in every case there was nothing in particular being framed – none of them provided vistas or new perspectives (in contrast to De Cock's frames, as we will see in the next case-study). In framing emptiness, these frames referred back to their own status as empty signs – invoking, perhaps, the circulating 'empty square' which Deleuze claimed was the basis of sense. Indeed, as we have seen, all Tatham and O'Sullivan's objects function in this way. As Lyotard observed, 'the images the matrix generates are both sharply defined and blurred at the same time.'[33]

[33] Lyotard, 'Fiscourse, Digure', 334

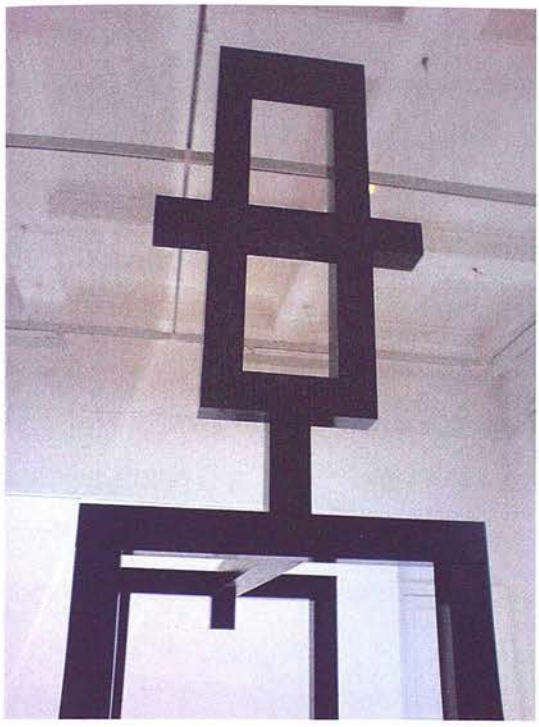


Fig. 7.9, 7.10, 7.11 Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *This has reached the limit conditions of a routine sequence of external actions*, 2005, (details)

The conundrum, revisited

Judd's trope of polarity and alliance is now well established in this thesis, and we are clearly dealing with another extension of this principle in Tatham and O'Sullivan's work. For Tatham, 'The great thing always about an artwork is its ability to occur simultaneously in many different spaces at the same time, to be many things equally and exactly.'[34] Although, she said, 'there are people who write well about art', she felt that 'to do that in a more conventional academic format [was] hard,'[35] echoing Derrida's observation in *Specters of Marx* that a scholar, *qua* scholar, has trouble addressing such spectres.

[34] Tatham interviewed by Thompson
[35] Ibid.

I want to end my case-study with a series of drawings, commissioned by the artists from Simon Manfield,[36] in which their cast of recurring 'objects' take centre-stage in various absurdist fictions, akin to optical illusions, puzzles or cryptic riddles. Top-hatted Victorian gents interact with closed boxes, open frames, pyramids, wedges, giant letters, and stick men. On the face of it, the tableaus represent productive gentlemanly Victorian activities – engineering, thinking, pastoral landscaping, reading, walking, gaming – signalling a kind of array of rational occupations. But the scope for rational decision and action is hampered: many scenarios allude to a dilemma. In *Now, this has reached the limit conditions of its own rhetoric*, two gents are attached by their backs to either side of a single frame (fig 7.12). One has let go of a balloon, while the other has dropped his dog's lead. The two are trapped, tragic-comically, in a pushmi-pullyu[37] type struggle – they cannot both chase after their lost treasure.

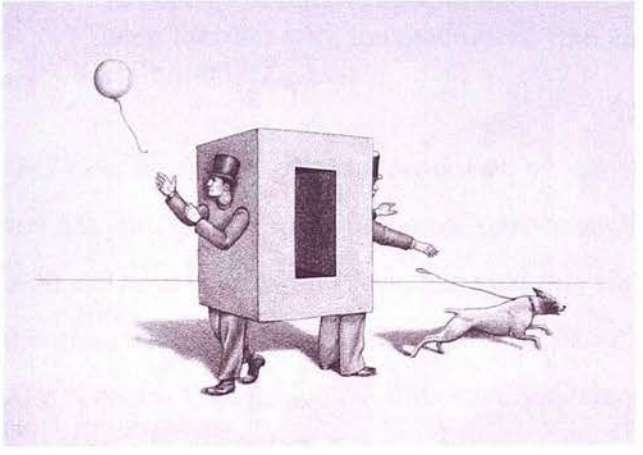


Fig. 7.12 Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan, *Now, this has reached the limit conditions of its own rhetoric*, 2005; drawing by Simon Manfield

Tatham and O' Sullivan's spectacle of contradiction adds a mystical, absurdist dimension to the conceptual strategies inherited from minimalism. It is as if the pair have seized on descriptions (by Fried and others) of the 'theatricality' of literalist objects and the uncanny potency of their emptiness, and visualised a new repertoire of objects on this basis. Forty years on, the power of 1960s minimal art to 'disturb' has arguably died away. If minimal objects are now seen as aesthetically appealing rather than

[36] These were shown in *echo echo* at the Collective Gallery in Edinburgh in parallel with the National Galleries of Scotland exhibition.
[37] A two-headed llama in Hugh Lofting's story, *Doctor Dolittle*

phenomenologically disconcerting, Tatham and O'Sullivan's works bring back the valuable perplexity that such art once engendered.

Jan de Cock

Jan de Cock was born in 1976 in Brussels, where he still lives. He studied sculpture at the University of Ghent. To earn money he worked as a carpenter, and also assisted his father, a cameraman for Belgian television. He would go on to use both his carpentry skills and his experience with the moving image to underpin his artistic programme. Where Tatham and O'Sullivan's installations are predominantly theatrical, de Cock's works are 'filmic'. According to Chris Dercon, de Cock was steeped in film from a young age.

> 'I first met Jan de Cock when he was working as an assistant cameraman. [...] Jan knows about the camera like he knows about the back of his hand and he has been familiar with the medium of film and its possibilities since early childhood.'[38]

De Cock, he explained, was 'possessed by' the history of film, from early optical devices and Muybridge's representations of movement, to the innovative editing of film-makers such as Dziga Vertov and Jean-Luc Godard. He was also interested in Deleuze's cinema theories, which explore the 'mutation' of the moving film image throughout the history of film (I return to these later). Importantly, Dercon added, 'the history of film [...] is not merely the history of film technique, it is also the history of a way of thinking.'[39] De Cock, he said, often used the 'language of film' to describe his own three dimensional effects.

> Relating to his work he uses terms like "sequences", "panorama", or even "travellings". He refers to the three-dimensional effect of the "camera obscura", the sequential principle of the "montage sec" and the psychological effects of the action "on screen" and "off screen", for what remains outside our visual field intrigues our imagination more than anything else [...] But the analogy Jan de Cock and other artists see between film and art can best be illustrated with the

[38] Chris Dercon, 'A Completely Different Idea, Elsewhere' in *Jan De Cock, Denkmal ISBN 9080842419*, (Ghent: Atelier Jan De Cock, 2004), 65
[39] Ibid.

> concept of 'filmic time', a concept that is most useful to approach the artist's work.[40]

This analogy is a productive one, as this case-study shows.

De Cock recently explained to Roxanna Marcoci, who curated his 2007 show at MOMA, that he looked to this cinematic inheritance for a way of re-thinking traditional approaches to artistic form. In Godard's films, he suggested, 'it is the form that thinks. It is not the thought that constructs form.'[41] As I discussed in chapter 3, this important distinction was also made by Judd who insisted that ideas were shaped by the work, as opposed to the other way round. De Cock also paid tribute to Muybridge, whose sequential ordering is evident in his own work. De Cock's enthusiasm for a 'form that thinks' is expressed in many ways, including his titling. *Denkmal* (de Cock's name for all his works) 'has two meanings,' he explains,

> In German, it means monument. In Flemish, it translates as denk, which means "think," and mal, which signifies "mold." This is precisely what photography, sculpture, and, more generally, art does: it creates a mold for thought.[42]

Besides this philosophical affinity with Judd and Godard, de Cock's style makes a clearer formal reference to Judd's than any of the other artists I have considered, (although this does not signal a simple recuperation of Judd's ideas, by any means). Rather than establish de Cock's interest in Judd with reference to his testimony, then, the nature of this relationship will emerge most effectively in an analysis of the work.

Picturing inheritance

De Cock's negotiation of his cinematic and modernist inheritance is made visible in his works in a variety of ways. His rectilinear forms echo the geometry of Constructivism, de Stijl and serial minimalism. His artist's books contain hundreds of historical artworks, reproduced alongside images of his own installations. These quotations are also re-

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[40] Ibid., 66
[41] Jan De Cock interviewed by Roxana Marcoci at MOMA, New York, October 12, 2007, http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2008/jandecock/interview.html
[42] Ibid.

situated in new installations. In *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main*, (2005), which I consider in more detail shortly (figs. 7.13, 7.14, 7.15), a large outdoor installation stood like an observation tower occupying a central vantage point in a Frankfurt square.

Fig. 7.13, 7.14, 7.15 Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main, 2005*, 2005, Chipboard and fixings, 12m x 12m; installation: Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (details)

Echoed in de Cock's plywood construction were the lofty green back-windows of reconstructed medieval houses on Römerberg, the 15th century red sandstone tower of Dom St Bartholomäus, the repeated modular units of the moulded concrete high-rise sited opposite, and the reflective glass expanse and 'white cube' galleries of the Schirn Kunsthalle itself. The work seemed to mirror particular elements of these surrounding buildings: the red and green colouring, the shiny glass, the modular construction. At the same time, all the buildings were *literally* reflected in the polished finish.

Indeed, de Cock's installations often frame and reflect external elements, effectively incorporating them. In his MOMA installation, in New York, for instance, (fig. 7.16), the precise location of the work in the museum constituted an extra dimension to the installation:

> MoMA's great art collection and its distinct departments became a substantial part of my project. This is evident not only in the photographs but also in the installation. When you are inside *Denkmal 11,* in the Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery on the third floor of the Museum, you can see across the room into the galleries displaying the photography collection. The current installation focuses on photographic series, such as Muybridge's locomotion studies. I see the works in the collection as a part of my exhibition, part of 'my' wall. At the same time, *Denkmal 11* is a part of the Museum's history.[43]

Fig. 7.16 Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 11, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, 2008, Module CDLIX*, 2008, chromogenic color prints and chipboard sculptures, dimensions variable; installation: The Museum of Modern Art, New York; photo: Atelier Jan De Cock, courtesy Galerie Fons Welters and Luis Campaña Gallery

He also glazed the photographic elements in the installation, so that the gallery space would enter the work in reflections. Extending the boundaries of his works, so that they could encompass that which was located nearby, (in response to which the work was first conceived), these installations *contained* and *displayed* their genealogy and their inheritance. This strategy adds an interesting conceptual dimension to Judd's *formal*

[43] Ibid.

containment of space, which, as we saw in chapter 4, Morris condemned as 'retardataire' cubism.[44]

'Perspective constructions'

The incorporation of a work's surroundings is part of its conceptual operation: the act of framing is important. It presents the viewer with their own viewing position, in history as well as in space. De Cock feels that there is a certain amount of continuity in cultural history – he regards modernism as 'the most important period in art history,' because it 'started with Romanticism and continues into our time.' In his view, it is not really possible to invent new forms:

> There are very basic forms—already present in Greek architecture, for example—that can only be reinvented. What matters is to keep fresh the way you look in order to still be able to see these basic forms.'[45]

For De Cock, then, negotiating our inheritance is less about the re-invention or re-iteration of these forms than about how we view them in time and space. If de Cock 're-invents' basic forms, he does so by *re-framing* them, rather than *reforming* them. In the process, he draws attention to the delay between their 'occurrence' and our perception of them.

Fig. 7.17 Jan de Cock, *Temps Mort XII. Long Island, May 2007, 'Lands' End' on Browns River Road, Sayville. Neg. 063*, 2007, chromogenic color print, 57 x 40 cm; photo: Atelier Jan De Cock, courtesy Galerie Fons Welters and Luis Campaña Gallery

[44] See above, 121
[45] Ibid.

His references to 'perspective' thus refer to a shifting relationship between object and viewer, rather than the static vision of classic perspectivism. They refer to chronological perspective as much as spatial perspective.

> [My series of panoramic traveller's photographs] *Temps Mort,* [fig. 7.16] which literally means "dead time," acts as a metaphoric interval that defines unused time. The time of a location is different from the time when the beholder sees it: it is invisible time, the time of history. At a certain point the viewer becomes aware of this delay in time. My installations are perspective constructions addressing that time interval.[46]

As one is made aware of one's personal perspective, it becomes clear that it is always shifting. De Cock uses reflections in the glass to disrupt the viewing experience and cause further perceptual displacement.

> Instead of a classical display, I conceive installations that deflect a central viewpoint. To expand this idea, I use highly reflective glass to glaze the photographs. Reflection further destabilizes the viewing experience. What I mean to say is that our understanding of the artwork is not fixed, but constantly changes. A good example is Umberto Boccioni's sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space.* The more you move around it, the more your perception of the work changes. [47]

I now explore, in detail, the operation of these perceptual and historical displacements in relation to *Denkmal 7.*

Frame and Screen

In *Denkmal 7,* one's attention regularly telescopes – like a camera pulling focus – from what lies *beyond* the chipboard structure, to what lies *on* the polished chipboard surfaces, and back again; that is to say, from 'sections' (the myriad vistas framed by the open boxes), to 'reproductions' (the reflected images that appear upon the panels and box sides). The open box is a recurring motif in de Cock's sculptures – it is a module that operates like a picture frame or window frame. Inside the piece, these 'frames' often open onto a surprising view of another part of the work, or a slice of the surrounding

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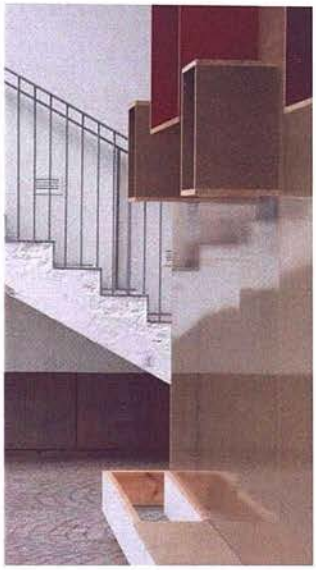
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

cityscape. The darkness around these embedded frames intensifies the brightness of the 'image', giving these luminous fragments of moving scenery the same hyperreal quality as images generated by a camera obscura, or projected in a darkened cinema. At the same time, the polished panels act as makeshift screens: the reflected 'images' of immediate surroundings appear duplicated and displaced (figs. 7.18 – 7.22)

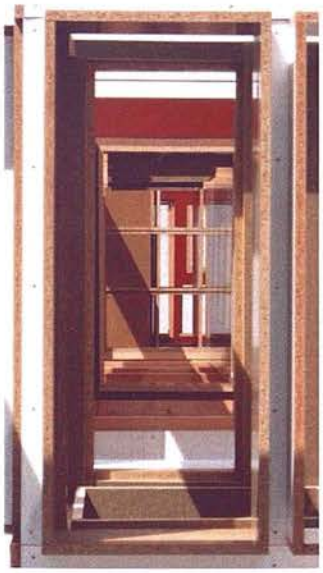
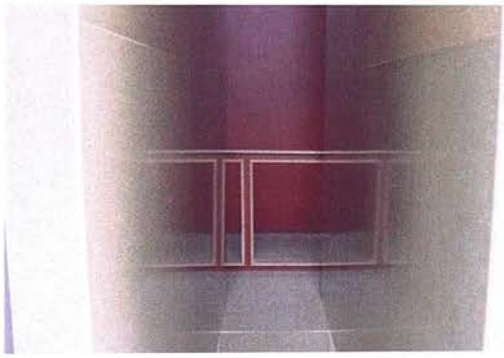



Fig. 7.18, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22
Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main, 2005* (details)

In *What is Cinema?* André Bazin (1918-1958) distinguished between a picture frame and a filmic frame. A painting, he argued, is a microcosm of the world – its frame marks the disjunction between the interior space of the painting and the natural continuous space of

the real world. The filmic frame, on the other hand, carves out a section of that real world:

> The outer edges of the screen are not, as the technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal.[48]

Bazin's distinction was qualified by Louis Marin in his contribution to a book about the rhetoric of the frame. Mimetic painting is an example of what Marin called *transitive representation*: the representation of something absent by the substitution of something present. In contrast, cinematic images are what he called *reflexive representation*: a performative act which displays something that is already present. This act of framing is equivalent to pointing. Without the frame, in other words, the representation would not exist.

Fig. 7.23 Frank Stella, *Gran Cairo*, 1962
Collection: Whitney Museum of American Art

[48] André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, first published posthumously from 1958-1962 as *Que est-ce que le Cinéma* (Paris: Editions du Cerf), trans., Hugh Gray, 1967-71 (Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1967) 166

De Cock's repeated use of the frame motif knowingly condenses these two forms: wooden frames, residually associated with *transitive* framing, here perform *reflexive* acts of framing. Occasionally, one frame appears inside another and the act of framing is itself framed. Marin noticed a similar combination in Stella's concentric line painting, *Gran Cairo* (fig. 7.23). Marin argues that

> if the frame is one of the means by which representation presents itself presenting something, Stella's picture represents its own presentation. The painting is entirely reflexive; its transitive dimension consists of representing its reflexive dimension; [that is] it facilitates the contemplation of representation as such.[49]

De Cock's structure, too, brings transitive and reflexive representations into a dizzying conglomeration. Taking inspiration from Le Corbusier's 'machine for living', I suggest that *Denkmal 7* is a *machine for framing*.

Movement framed

Movement is registered visually as *displacement* (that is, whether an object moves, or the viewer of that object). As an adjacent train moves off, a passenger on an adjacent, stationary, train feels the sensation of motion. This illusion of movement depends on the surrounding view being masked beyond the parameters of the carriage window – a wider view would clarify what is moving in relation to what. The film camera, too, masks its wider surroundings (and indeed, its own means of locomotion) so the relation between moving camera and moving subject is always in play, and close cropping can give rise to ambiguity. For Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007), writing in 1933,

> The old effect, namely the moving landscape, is arrived at from an entirely new starting point, and in the process the principle of relativity, on which the effect is based, is formulated explicitly: in motion pictures, movement is not absolute but always related to the station point of the camera.[50]

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[49] Louis Marin, 'The frame of representation and some of its figures', in Paul Duro, ed., *The Rhetoric of the Frame: essays on the boundaries of the artwork* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 93

[50] Rudolf Arnheim, 'The Thoughts that Made the Picture Move' in *Film als Kunst*, (Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt, 1932), *Film as Art*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1958) 139

It may be that a moving shot more closely resembles everyday vision than a static shot, but we need to distinguish between everyday vision, facilitated by head movements (vision which tends to be dispersed, sub-conscious, scanning, and only occasionally focussed on a task or an object), and the moving mechanical eye of the camera, which consistently frames sections of scenes and requires us to focus intently on them. A moving camera often adopts the viewpoint of a particular character in narrative cinema at moments of intense concentration: moments of awe, fear or malice. In these instances, suspense arises from the gradual revelation of masked-off parts of the scene – the movement itself becomes charged, and more emphatically noticeable.

Arnheim described how the impulse to move the film camera came early on in film history:

> Mr M A Promio who toured Europe in 1896 with a new Lumière apparatus, as a camera reporter and projectionist combined in one person, writes: 'In Italy, it occurred to me for the first time to make travelling shots. After arriving in Venice, I took the boat from the station to my hotel. When I saw the buildings along the Canale Grande move by, I had the idea that the film camera, which could take pictures of moving things while it was standing still, perhaps could take immobile things while it was moving itself (...)'.[51]

From the outset, then, camera movement was associated with vehicular propulsion. Deleuze, in his historical study of the cinema as *movement-image*, described the opening scene of *The Last Laugh* (1925) by Murnau, where the camera (mounted on a bicycle)[52] enters a lift, and descends into the entrance hall of a grand hotel. As it travels, the camera performs 'constant decompositions and recompositions' of the scene. Then, it 'goes through the vestibule and through the enormous revolving door in a single and perfect tracking shot.'[53] Deleuze was struck by the fact that the camera made use of 'two movements, two moving bodies or vehicles, the lift and the bicycle.'[54] He concluded that

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[51] Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 138-9

[52] This popular story was said by Murnau's widow to be apocryphal.

[53] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, first published as *Cinema 1, L'Image-Mouvement* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1983), trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (London: Athlone Press, 1986) 22

[54] Ibid.

'the mobile camera is like a general equivalent of all the means of locomotion that it shows or that it makes use of – aeroplane, car, boat, bicycle, foot, metro.'[55] While natural perception 'attaches movement as if it were a vehicle,' the 'movement-image' extracts from these locomotions 'the mobility which is their essence.'[56] The movement-image makes movement, in itself, visible. The 'mobile section of movements' in Murnau's film does not picture a 'whole that changes', Deleuze argued, but instead puts 'bodies, parts, aspects, dimensions, distances, and the respective positions of the bodies which make up a set in the image into variation.'[57] He cited Epstein's comparison of the movement-image to a cubist painting: 'All the surfaces are divided, truncated, decomposed, broken [...] Instead of submitting to perspective, the painter splits it, enters it.'[58] This kaleidoscopic characterisation of the cubist/movement-image resonates strongly in the context of de Cock's works.

To begin with, the narrow framing of details in de Cock's structures generates suspense. Perceived in stasis, they can be read as 'cut-away' details, which acquire logic only in sequence with other shots. Seen on the move, each section evolves and mutates.

Fig. 7.24 Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 53, Tate Modern, Bankside 53, London SE1 9TG, 2005,* (detail)

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 23
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., citing J. Epstein, *Ecrits 1, sur le cinema*, 115 (no bibliographic detail given)

When both the viewpoint and the framed scene are in motion (the trees in *Denkmal 1* at the Tate Modern looked particularly striking in this context), there is a strong visceral impression of the relativity and the simultaneity of multiple vectors of movement (fig. 7.24).

Following one of these vectors, de Cock's various layered screens, boxes and blocks glide in and out of view, giving rise to dramatic parallax shifts – it is as if the structure itself has been set in motion by unseen cogs. This captivating effect recalls the distinctive dolly shots in Andrei Tarkovsky's films, where the camera frame finds another framing device within the scene: a camera travels slowly past a window (such as the burnt out truck window in *Stalker*, 1979), or approaches and then passes through a door (like the back door of the childhood home in *Mirror*, 1975).[59] Within the narrative context of these films, suspense is tinged with a sense of foreboding, as one might feel in a dream. In the more open context of de Cock's artworks, however, the purely formal aspects of such suspense come to the fore: it is the consistently fragmentary nature of these views that makes them intriguing. De Cock's suspenseful structure is a device that illuminates snapshot details in order to draw attention to the wider frameworks of vision. Using filmic analogies to frame our movements, de Cock prompts a consideration of the nature of mobility and perception, and in particular, their links with desire, curiosity and anxiety.

Vision in Motion

In some respects *Denkmal 7* reprised László Moholy-Nagy's *Light-Space Modulator* from 1922-30. Consisting of opaque, transparent and perforated components, and illuminated by a fixed electric light, this kinetic sculpture revolved like the clockwork insides of a music box and produced a graceful ballet of shadows and reflections on the surrounding walls (fig. 7.25). Moholy-Nagy's piece alluded both to old magic lanterns and to new technologies of film projection. In a pointed pun, his 1930 film of the work in motion was called *Motion picture black-white-gray* (fig. 7.26).[60]

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[59] See below, 298, for a more detailed account of this scene.
[60] This film was one of those included in 'The Minimalism Issue', *Aspen* nos. 5-6, 1967. See above, 69

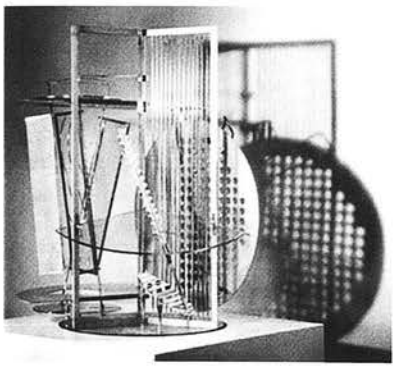
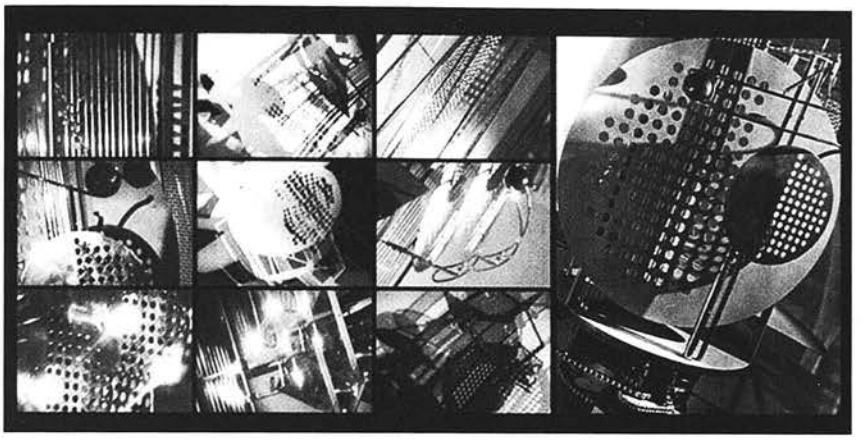


Fig. 7.25 (left) Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Light-Space Modulator,* 1922-30, chrome-plated steel, aluminium, glass, acrylic glass, wood; Bauhaus Archive, Berlin

Fig. 7.26 (below) Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Motion picture black-white-gray,* 1930, film stills



Both the *Light-Space modulator* and *Denkmal 7* reference the idea of cinema while replacing the cinematic projection onto a two-dimensional, vertical and fixed cinematic screen, with shadows and reflections skidding across a variety of angled, labyrinthine, intersecting surfaces. On 'show' is the orchestration of light and its effect on the surroundings and on perception - that is, there is no 'content' or narrative to speak of. Both works ask us to consider aspects of the cinematic as it appears, and indeed as it shapes appearance, in the urban world.

In 1946, Moholy-Nagy formulated his concept of 'vision in motion,' which explored the effect of relatively recent locomotive technologies upon the visualisation of one's surroundings, particularly in the new perspectives they afforded:

> In our age of airplanes, architecture is viewed not only frontally and from the sides, but also from above – vision in motion (...). Architecture no longer appears

> static but, if we think in terms of airplanes and motor cars, architecture is linked with movement.[61]

For Moholy-Nagy and others of his generation, the shift in the constitution of everyday visual experience, from relatively static to predominantly moving perception, would eventually change consciousness altogether:

> We are heading toward a kinetic, time-spatial existence; towards an awareness of the forces plus their relationships which define all life and of which we had no previous knowledge and for which we have as yet no exact terminology. The affirmation of all these space-time forces involves a re-orientation of all our faculties [...]. Space-time stands for many things: relativity of motion and its measurement, integration, simultaneous grasp of the inside and the outside, revelation of structure instead of façade.[62]

Moholy-Nagy argued that the advent of film had anticipated the 'vision in motion' of a 'motorized' world, and that film, together with art, would play a crucial part in articulating this wider reorientation of perception.

As we saw in Chapter 5, the increasing virtuality of experience, and its startling impact on 'time-spatial existence', has been an area of fervent speculation for many post-structuralist theorists, including Baudrillard and Virilio. Virilio, echoing Moholy-Nagy, asserted the conceptual links between the invention of cinema and the advent of aviation, suggesting that "[t]here [was] an instructive coincidence between the *parade of cinema sequences*, the filmic weightlessness of the frame, and the invention of an aerial *kinematic parade.*"[63] He pointed out that the sequential photographer Jules-Etienne Marey had been President of the French Société de Navigation Aérienne.[64] Since then, Virilio argued, there had been an intensification of this conjunction between modern travel and the moving image; "spatial distance" had gradually given way to "temporal distance" alone, and it was "no longer possible to distinguish [...] the automotive from

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[61] Laszlo Moholy Nagy, 'Space-Time Problems' repr., Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Esthetics Contemporary*, revised edition, (Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 69
[62] Ibid., 73
[63] Paul Virilio, "The Last Vehicle" in *Polar Inertia*, trans. Patrick Camiller, (London: Sage, 2000) 27
[64] Actually, Marey was appointed Vice-President, in 1874

the audiovisual."[65] In fact, in *Denkmal 7*, de Cock juxtaposes the two, in the mind at least. They may be closely intertwined, but in this work, it is still possible to separate them conceptually, if not in actuality.

Denkmal 7 incorporated an existing set of steps and an elevated open-air walkway at the side of the gallery. Consequently, one's movement around the work was not unrelated to the 'aerial kinematic parade'. Ascending the steps and reaching the walkway in *Denkmal 7* radically transformed one's sense of the work (figs 7.27).

Figs. 7.27 (left), 7.28 (below left) Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main, 2005* (details)

Hidden from common view below, there was a suite of 'rooms' in the 'roof' space (fig. 7.28). The view of the work's inner components was dramatically reversed. Standing on

[65] Ibid., 20-21

the cobbles moments before, and looking up, I had seen blue squares of sky. Now, from the elevated walkway, framed patches of cobblestone hovered in distant apertures below (fig. 7.29). The reciprocity of the two positions – my experience of them as complementary framed 'images', closely aligned in memory – recalled Virilio's description of the TV transmission of the moon landings, which amounted to the '*simultaneity of vision between the moon on the screen and in the window.*'[66]

Figs. 7.29 (left) and 7.30 (right) Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 7, Schirn Kunsthalle, Romerberg 7, Frankfurt am Main, 2005* (details)

So where does this work fit within a spectacular culture that has inured us to the equivalence of the automotive and the audiovisual? Recall that, for de Cock, the filmic is not just a way of looking, but a "way of thinking."[67] Iain Chambers has argued that the 'cinematic' is 'a way of picturing and enframing the world'. It is a 'language' that permeates contemporary experience:

> As a language [...] cinema contributes to the making of the visualscapes, soundscapes and culturalscapes in which we move [...] This perhaps suggests that we should [...] consider cinema as one of the languages we inhabit, dwell in, and in which we, our histories, cultures and identities are constituted [...] Languages, whether literary, cinematic, musical or verbal, and even if often dependent upon quite precise techno-cultural systems, are not turned on and off by the flick of a switch. They persist and permeate our world. They ghost our presence and circulate beyond our individual volition. As part and parcel of the ecology of our lives, they exist prior to our knowing and this informs our being and becoming.

[66] Virilio, 'Polar Inertia', 118. See above, 187-8
[67] Dercon, 'A Completely Different Idea' 65

> They are irreducible to a medium or technology. They are part of our understanding."[68]

Film, in other words, has not only articulated perceptual re-orientations in our culture, as Moholy-Nagy suggested it would, it has also shaped them. Following in the footsteps of Moholy-Nagy, de Cock's construction of open frames and solid screens advances a link between the forms of sculpture, architecture and film. De Cock, though, makes a much greater bodily demand on the spectator that Moholy-Nagy did. Audiences are visually lured, then physically rebuffed, aesthetically delighted, then spatially confused. De Cock's sculptures challenge spectators to consider the implications of disembodied visuality in relation to how they negotiate (both physically and conceptually) the city, its buildings, its institutions and its monuments. If cinema haunts a person as they move around the city, then de Cock's *Denkmal 7* brings this ghosting to light.

Futuristic Ruins

For Smithson, architectural and conceptual grids were used as a means of 'containing' chaos. Humans imposed 'grids and geometries' on nature in order to flee or flout the manifold 'real' that terrified them.[69] In 'Art Through The Camera's Eye' (c1971), Smithson suggested that the 'neutral' eye of a camera might allow artists to picture this opposition between *nature* and *abstraction*, to see them together *in the same take*, as it were:

> The buried cities of Yucatan are heterogeneous time capsules, full of lost abstractions and broken frameworks. There the wilderness and the city intermingle, nature spills into the abstract frames, the containing narrative of an entire civilisation breaks apart to form another kind of order. A film is capable of picking up the pieces.[70]

De Cock constructs filmic structures that offer the same 'arbitrary' framing. The lost abstractions and arcane frameworks of rationalism and classicism are partially excavated in the splintered views and kaleidoscopic surface reflections of his monoliths. Like the

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[68] Iain Chambers, 'Maps, Movies, Musics and Memory' in David B Clarke, ed., *The Cinematic City*, (London: Routledge, 1997) 230-31
[69] Robert Smithson, 'Art Through The Camera's Eye' in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, 374
[70] Ibid., 375

other artists I have considered here, de Cock appears to be both sceptical *and* sincere. On the one hand, he draws attention to the framing of our cultural experiences through pastiche – his colonising sculptural out-growths at Tate Modern mimicked the service points of the institution, the ticket desks, merchandising and food outlets sited throughout the building (figs. 7.31 and 7.32). On the other hand, his futuristic ruins are *mise-en-scènes*, which are designed to counter the 'weightlessness' of navigating through the culture industry's zones of spectacle. Like Smithson's camera, de Cock's 'machines' offer a pointed framing of culture's myriad 'containing narratives', making them momentarily visible.

Figs. 7.31 and 7.32 Jan de Cock, *Denkmal 53, Tate Modern, Bankside 53, London SE1 9TG, 2005* (details)

With the fore-going case-studies in mind, I now return to the beginnings of my sequence class – to the works of Judd – and propose a series of fresh readings, based on the parameters and perspectives provided by the artistic debates of the 1980s/90s, and the 2000s.

Chapter 8
Judd's Crystals

Searching for crystals

'The first time I saw Don Judd's "pink Plexiglas box" it suggested a giant crystal from another planet.' [1] So began Smithson's 1966 essay, 'The Crystal Land.' As we know, Smithson first introduced his crystal analogy the year before in an essay that Judd had asked him to write.[2] Judd later lost patience with Smithson's eclectic, referential approach, but while the two were still on friendly terms, they discovered a 'mutual interest in geology and mineralogy', and took a road trip together with Julie Finch and Nancy Holt to hunt rocks in New Jersey. 'Out of this excursion came reflections, reconstituted as follows [...]'[3] wrote Smithson. The pun on reflections, as we will see, was intentional.

Although he did not mention Judd's work directly, the essay contained a series of observations that obliquely reference Judd's forms – it was as if his signature shapes made veiled appearances in the shifting landscape of the day-trippers. If Smithson did indeed propose a new set of associations for Judd's practice, they have not been taken up by historians of 'minimalism', perhaps because such associations were implied rather than asserted, because they seemed to spring from Smithson's pre-occupations rather than Judd's, and because Judd did not sanction Smithson's interpretative approach. Nevertheless, 'The Crystal Land' has played an important role in the development of this thesis. Reading it prompted me to clarify what had been, up to that point, a series of vague observations about the filmic quality of movement and reflection in Judd's work. For this reason, a detailed account of the essay will serve as a useful introduction to my final chapter.

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[1] Smithson, 'The Crystal Land' in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, 7
[2] See above, 95
[3] Smithson, 'The Crystal Land', 7

In the essay, Smithson provided a cinematic unfolding of the day, punctuated with 'cutaways' to little details. He began with what I envisage as an 'establishing shot' - a description of the image of New Jersey housing developments, seen from the quarry cliffs. The painted houses formed 'tiny boxlike arrangements…' and the highways 'crisscross[ing] through the towns' created 'manmade geological networks of concrete.' 'In fact,' he observed, 'the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centres, a sense of the crystalline prevails.'[4] Coming down from the first quarry, they stopped for an ice cream (remarking that ice, too, is a crystal) and then returned to car. The subsequent cataloguing of impressions and episodes, along with snatched quotes from the car radio, all served to emphasise the sense of locomotion and of time passing, of rolling through a landscape. Inside the car, Smithson's eyes 'glanced over the dashboard, [which] became a complex of chrome fixed into an embankment of steel.' He observed that: 'Faint reflections slid over the windshield […] Under the radio dial (55-7-9-11-14-16) a row of five plastic buttons in the shape of cantilevered cubes. The rearview mirror dislocated the road behind us.'[5]

The cantilevered cubes bring to mind works like *To Susan Buckwalter* (fig. 8.7). The sliding and dislocating reflections that appear across the car evoke Judd's reflective surfaces. Can there be any doubt that Smithson sought to re-situate Judd's abstract works in the everyday landscapes of 1960s New York and New Jersey? Plexiglas (the American brand name for acrylic glass) was invented in the 1930s, and soon appeared in jukeboxes, cinema signs and car insignias. In the 1950s it began to appear in gas stations and ice cream parlours, in sunglasses and sunroofs (this last invention, according to the manufacturer, 'brought us a little closer to the world we drove through').[6] By the 1960s, it was being used in architectural applications: facades, windows, and colourful lighting, and had become an integral design element in the car. We know that Judd was interested in using car finishes to abstract ends (fig 8.1 shows his lists of automobile models). Smithson's account caused Judd's works to re-materialise in the very world from which they sprang, but which they seemed to spurn. In addition, it is worth noting that such

[4] Ibid., 8
[5] Ibid.
[6] http://www.plexiglas.com/home/aboutus/timeline

cultural landscapes change over time. The evolution of Plexiglas applications has continued and further associations have accrued in retrospect. In the 1970s, for instance, Plexiglas was used for disco dancefloors, providing a retrospective association that Morris later embraced and that Tatham and O'Sullivan would recognize and reinforce in their own *détournement* of minimalist forms.

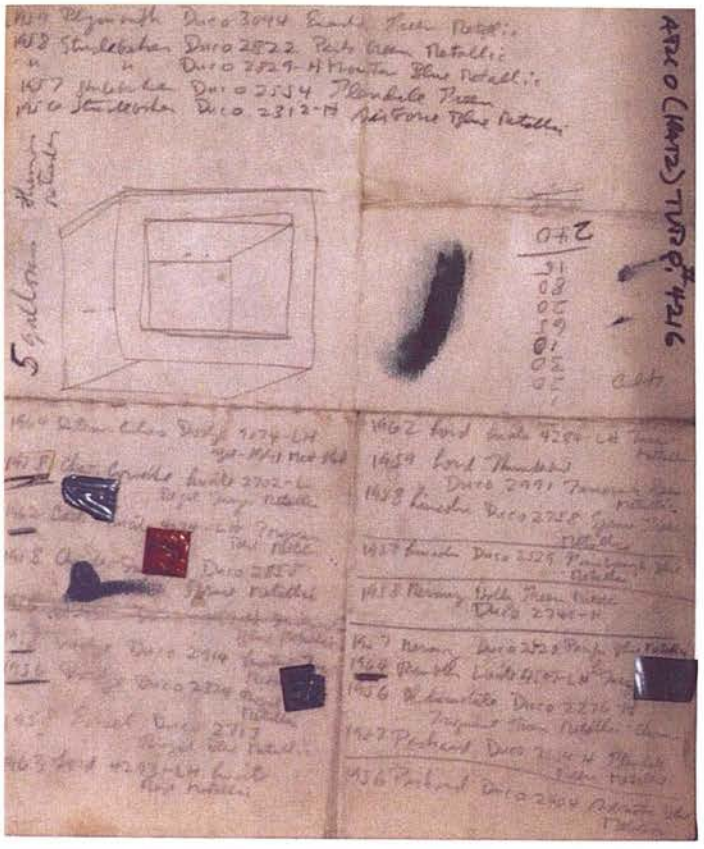

Fig 8.1 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* c.1964, pencil and colour samples on paper, 35 x 29 cm, collection of Judd Foundation

Of course, these references are not sufficient on their own to provide a new reading of Judd's work. Smithson's field of allusive association – containing crystals, cinema, cities and cars – should not be mistaken for an 'interpretation.' They do, however, point the way, as I show in this chapter, to a new set of philosophical perspectives.

Recently I discovered the title 'The Crystal Land' was probably inspired by the setting of an autobiographical poem written by 'John Shade', a character in Vladimir Nabokov's

1962 novel *Pale Fire*.[7] The poem juxtaposes the poet's domestic activities at home with tragic events that take place outside (in a mountain landscape of ice, frozen lakes, and snow) which lead to the death of his daughter. The author imagines himself as the ghost of a bird who has died flying into a window. The impact marks a splice in time – the 'waxwing' is slain, but its 'ashen fluff' flies on, out of time, in the reflected sky. This apparently whimsical moment in the opening stanza foreshadows the trauma of his daughter's death; it constitutes a fantasy that at the fateful moment, she might live on and that he might continue, unfelled by bad news.

> I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
> By the false azure in the windowpane;
> I was the smudge of ashen fluff – and I
> Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.
> And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate
> Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:
> Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass
> Hang all the furniture above the grass,
> And how delightful when a fall of snow
> Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so
> As to make chair and bed exactly stand
> Upon that snow, out in that crystal land![8]

Opening the curtains at night, he finds his room, too, is reflected in the windowpane, so that its contents appear to stand in the snow outside. He imagines himself and his things suspended in a parallel world, a 'crystal land'. But underlying this vivid and playful image, there is melancholy. The verse is haunted by an unseen presence. We picture the aptly named Shade contemplating his other self, reflected in the window. At the same time, such a scenario – Shade standing in a well-lit room looking out into a world of darkness – invariably suggests a cloaked vantage point from which an 'Other' might look back into the house. In the novel John Shade's work has been edited by the narrator of the story, Charles Kinbote, whose obsessive attentions towards Shade border on stalking.

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[7] Jonathan Bass, 'Zembla is Elsewhere: Robert Smithson's displacement of Nabokov's Pale Fire', paper given at 'Open Systems', Tate Modern, 18 September 2005. Bass refuted the argument made by many commentators that Smithson was referencing JG Ballard's *The Crystal World.*

[8] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, first published in 1962, (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 29

As well as the intriguing time splits engendered by the reflections, then, there is also an uncanny impression of surveillance, recalling, perhaps, the shining 'light that sees' in Hatoum's *Light Sentence*, and Derrida's third that stalks the doubling /splitting transaction of reflection.[9] These intriguing characteristics re-surface in Judd's work; indeed, I argue that his direct and concise structures put such aspects on display, and ask us to speculate about them.

Double vision

Giving a talk about Judd's work in the context of a 2009 exhibition entitled 'Urban Reflections' curated by Kirsten Lloyd and Christine Nippe,[10] I was struck by a particular work in the exhibition, which I describe here because it offers a further encapsulation of some of the themes in this chapter, and offers a visually-realised complement to Smithson's poetic observations. Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani's *Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway* (fig 8.2), is a double video projection. On one half of the screen we see the car ride sequence in Tarkovsky's 1972 science-fiction, *Solaris*, filmed from inside the car. On the other half, we see the same journey filmed by the artists three decades later.

Fig 8.2 Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani, *Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway,* 2005, video, double projection, 2 minutes

With this device, Fischer and el Sani are able to display subtle shifts in historical and spatial perspective, like de Cock does with his photographs and installations. We are re-tracing the steps of Tarkovsky after 33 years, and the two times are seen in parallel. Such a dual perspective equates to my dual role in this thesis: I see the same work through two

[9] See above, 193
[10] 'Urban Reflections', *Stills Gallery*, Edinburgh, 23 November 2008 - 22 March 2009

different frames, acting both as historian and critic. I encounter Judd's works as *repetition* (I see them through the lens of a reconstructed notion of the 1960s), and *first time* (I experience the works in their immediacy). More importantly, when I encounter a *revenant*, and see things that have hitherto passed unnoticed, then repetition and first time combine to form a *hauntology*. In this chapter, I look again at Judd's 1960s oeuvre through the theoretical lenses provided by Smithson and the artists in my case-studies. This will enable me to 'speak to' the spectres that have haunted the work from the beginning.

First, it is worth describing *Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway* in more detail. This video sequence establishes some of the physical and theoretical parameters that are also operational in Judd's works. In various ways, navigating Judd's work is reminiscent of the navigation of an urban landscape, as I will show. In *Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway* the views through the camera lenses mutate as the cars travel round bends and through tunnels. Our trajectory along these arcs brings new objects and vistas into view at every moment. As the road descends underground and emerges again moments later, window-like apertures in the walls flash by. Inside the tunnels, the rows of lights gleam in the sudden darkness, and are reflected rhythmically in the metal of passing cars. In the open air, one road occasionally runs under another, mounted above us on concrete uprights. All these features emphasise an effect of perspectival recession, and yet classic perspective is undermined as we plunge into it (as Epstein's description of the movement-image suggested).[11] There is no stable viewpoint - in perpetual motion, we can only scan. In both bodies of work, the ad hoc frames that punctuate one's progress produce the pulsating rhythm of a zoetrope – a sensation that aptly conveys the partial, sequential, unending nature of navigating the modern metropolis.

Tarkovsky's original sequence included cutaways to the front-seat passenger (omitted from Fischer and el Sani's piece) which are also of interest. *Solaris* was based on Stanislaw Lem's story of spectres haunting a cosmonaut crew on a surveying operation around another planet. Burton, a former pilot who had witnessed the start of these

[11] See above, 275

strange occurrences, has just tried to warn his Solaris-bound colleague, Kelvin, but with little success. In the Expressway scene, Burton is returning from this meeting, deep in thought, and blankly staring. Burton's bodily immobility in the car is in stark contrast to the perpetual transformations outside. The sense of interminable, weightless gliding (the sequence is over four minutes long) recalls Virilio's association of 'the filmic weightlessness of the frame,' and the 'aerial *kinematic parade*" in his essay 'The Last Vehicle.[12] In the early 1970s, the Tokyo Expressway would have seemed startlingly advanced to Russian and European audiences: this extended episode establishes a futuristic setting for the film, and at the same time visualises an accentuation of dislocated experience in the future and anticipates Virilio's argument that the automotive and the audiovisual would eventually become indistinguishable.[13]

Should we be concerned that Judd's work creates a spectacle for a disembodied eye, and induces a weightless, mobile, restless vision? I argued in the last chapter that de Cock's filmic structures picture the condensation of the automotive and the audiovisual without completely capitulating to it (that is, they allow viewers to keep sight of their bodies). Is it useful to think about Judd's work in similar terms? What illuminating theoretical propositions can we derive from Judd's sculptural structures and ephemeral effects if we think of them in terms of the structural language of film?

Reflecting Pool

The translucent quality of Judd's pink Plexiglas box (fig 8.3) ensures a layering of images, all visible in one 'take': the material itself, the floor and wires beneath, reflections of the roof above, reflections of people walking past. We know that Judd's reflective effects were disconcerting for critics, who considered them to be illusionistic and spectacular, in spite of the fact that Judd was famous for his anti-illusionist stance; and as we saw in chapter 4, Morris associated such layering effects with the 'retardataire' aesthetic of cubism.

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[12] Paul Virilio, "The Last Vehicle" in *Polar Inertia*, trans., Patrick Camiller, (London: Sage, 2000) 27. See above, 278-9

[13] Ibid., 20-1. Again, see above, 278-9

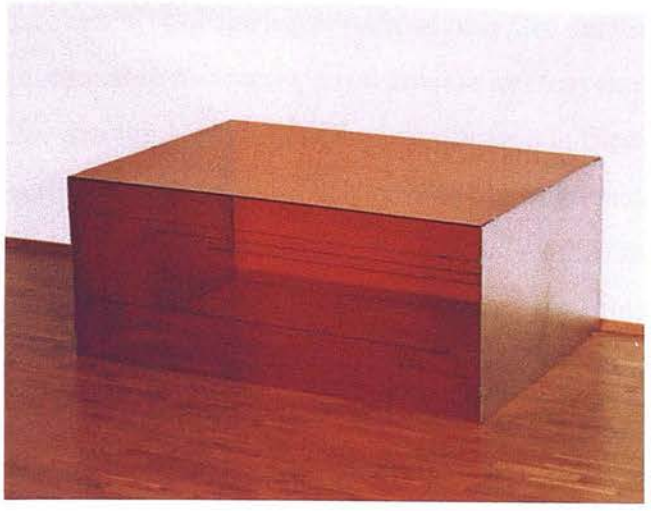

Fig 8.3 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1966, amber Plexiglas and stainless steel, 20" x 48" x 34", Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart; photo: Burt Bergemeister Pfullingen

Extricating ourselves from the parameters of the 1960s debate however, we can now see such layering in a new light. Hiller's exploration of the notion of reflection, for example, re-complicates the simplified terms of the old polemic. What interpretative possibilities are opened up if we compare the tinted reflective surfaces of Judd's Plexiglas boxes to a 'reflecting pool'? I will shortly draw comparisons between Judd's work and Bill Viola's film, 'The Reflecting Pool' (1977-9) (fig. 8.5).

In chapter 1, I argued that reflections illuminate the relations between objects. I used Merleau-Ponty's motif of the reflecting swimming pool to suggest that reflections also illuminate the relations between the 'visible' and the 'invisible'. Merleau-Ponty argued that the tiling at the bottom of a pool is seen *through* the water and the reflections there; that is to say, seen because of them, not in spite of them; and in constituting the 'element' of the visible, reflections also implicitly signalled the (limitless) range of other possible relations that they might, just as easily, constitute.[14] Judd's reflections, like Merleau-Ponty's, reveal more than simply the reciprocal relations between objects in the scene or set, then, they also allude to the realm of wider possibility. More importantly still, Judd's reflective surfaces *draw attention* to the fact that they face two ways.

Hiller described her reflecting pool as 'a two-way mirror, an interface between the objects which are reflected in it from outside and the objects in the pool, which are seen

[14] See above, 23-5

through it.'[15] For Hiller, such an interface caused 'an end to the notion of a clear relationship between a fixed outside referent and its transparently mirrored reflection.'[16] We can think of Judd's Plexiglas surface in the same way. I already argued that it might constitute a permeable border between fixed material and fluid illusion, that is to say, the boundary between two *unalike* series. As the 'straight line' that separates and connects the two series, I also compared Judd's permeable boundary to the Aion in Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*, (i.e. the border between two tables or series 'like the sky and the earth, propositions and things, expressions and consumptions.')[17] Now, I would like to push further within Deleuze's theoretical framework and consider his later work on the movement-image.

In Cinema 1, following Bergson, Deleuze characterised the whole as that which contains all possible sets of objects. Sets are *closed*, he argued, while the whole (which is not itself a set) is radically *open*. He argued that 'Relation is not a property of objects, it is always external to its terms. Relations do not belong to objects, but to the whole.'[18] If each closed set is part of a larger, open, 'whole', then that whole can be changed by the movements within a set: 'By movement in space, the objects of a set change their respective positions. But, through relations, the whole is changed, or changes qualitatively. We can say of duration itself or of time, that it is the whole of relations.'[19] The 'whole' is similar, then, to Merleau-Ponty's 'invisible' (the world's 'own and interior possibility')[20] and, indeed, to Deleuze's own Aion (a zone of 'an infused and ramified chance.')[21]

For Deleuze, it is *movement* that 'relates the objects of a closed system to open duration, and duration to the objects of the system which it forces to open up.'[22] In cinema, in other words, *movement* is the permeable boundary between the closed set and the open

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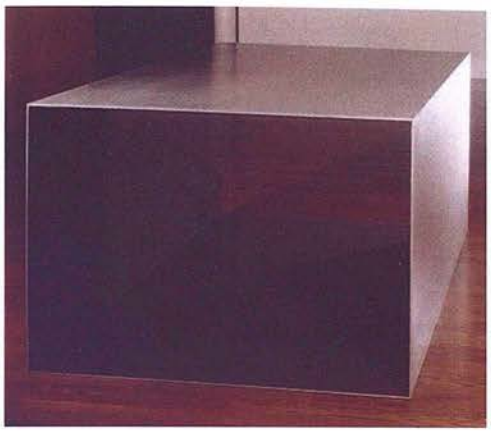
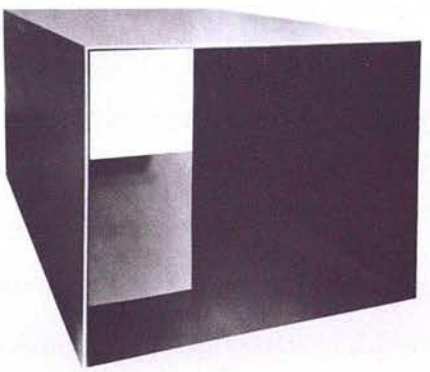
[15] Hiller, 'Reflections', 69–70.
[16] Ibid., 70. See above, 212
[17] See above, 228
[18] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 10
[19] Ibid.
[20] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 20. See above, 20
[21] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 64. See above, 228
[22] Ibid., 11

whole – it is the *event* that links them. It is thus possible to see Judd's reflections in terms of Deleuze's notion of 'Relation': they signal the relations between objects while at the same time belonging to the 'whole', and they posit a permeable boundary between the two precisely by being in constant, mobile transformation. I will show in the coming sections how this transformation is effected, and how it generates an uncanny presence.





Figs 8.4a and 8.4b Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1969, clear anodised aluminium and purple Plexiglas, 33" x 68" x 48", Thomas and Cristina Bechtler, Switzerland; photo on left: The Saatchi Gallery, London

First, though, I consider Judd's purple lined box (fig. 8.4), which also plays with the analogy of a reflecting pool. A person approaching or passing the box on the other side is reflected in the limpid, Plexiglas lined bottom. The correspondence between the actual person and his or her reflection is disrupted, however. The top of the box and the patch of floor (seen through the opening) divide the image and its source. The edges of the box's opening are also reflected in the Plexiglas; they create a frame within a frame which further removes the reflected image from its source's surroundings. In many interesting ways, the sculpture anticipates Viola's film, 'The Reflecting Pool' (fig. 8.5).

A man stands at the edge of an outdoor swimming pool, with his reflection at his feet. After a few minutes standing still he jumps up, and his reflection disappears like an old TV set being switched off. He remains frozen in mid-air while the rest of the scene continues on without him.

Fig 8.5 Bill Viola, *The Reflecting Pool,* 1977-79, video, 7 mins, (stills), collection: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Like John Shade's waxwing hitting the window, the man's leap has caused time to splice; only on this occasion the memory appears frozen, as real time proceeds. The suspended figure gradually fades from view. We hear other people approach, but we see only their reflections in the water – the edge of the pool remains deserted. These characters are present, but only as spectres. They seem 'out-of-time', like the disembodied and dislocated images of cinema. Reflections deprived of their real bodies play on the water like old home movies – as if the pool were reminiscing. The impression of different registers of time running simultaneously is disconcerting. The impression of seeing *time* as much as things happening in time, is a condition of Deleuze's time-image, which I explore in more detail later.

The reflections in Judd's purple box share the same sense of dislocation. Although these reflections can in fact be ascribed to the physical effects of 'global illumination' (as Judd pointed out when people asked him about his illusionism), there remains something uncanny about them. Unlike the everyday chiasmic reflections in Merleau-Ponty's swimming pool, the reflections in Judd's horizontal surfaces have a heightened, focussed, *distilled* quality. This is due, I think, to the machine-tooled polish of the Plexiglas, and its tinted shades. The pink and amber tones of his wired boxes are reminiscent of sunglass lenses, (also manufactured in Plexiglas) which, in reducing solar glare, seem to bring the world into sharper focus. Indeed, such reflections in Judd's works, like Bazin's cinematic image, appear to be 'cut out' of reality, removed from it and replayed nearby. The 'frame' of the image is determined by the angular shape of the surface that 'screens' it. Deleuze argued that such a screen/frame ensured 'the deterritorialisation of the

image.'[23] By all these means, Judd's reflections are *made strange*, or at any rate, palpable. I have suggested that moving reflections carry intimations of the 'invisible' and of 'Aion': the uncanny dislocation produced by Viola's pool and Judd's purple box makes the presence of these fields – that is to say, their absence – *felt*. This suggests that we ought to explore the significance of the out-of-frame further.

Moved by suspense

The zone 'outside-the-frame' has particular significance for Judd's viewers. In chapter 4, I considered Krauss's discovery of the surprising deceptions in Judd's forms. I return to this theme now, and show how one is often propelled around his works by the intuition of a 'missing explanation'. Detailed description is necessary because reproductions cannot communicate the effects I want to discuss. To explore the contradictory and enigmatic aspects of Judd's constructions, I need to explain how the nature of each piece is only gradually revealed.

Fig 8.6 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1972, copper and light cadmium red enamel on aluminium, 91.6 x 155.5 x 178.2 cm, collection: presented by the American Fund to Tate Gallery 1992; photo: Marcus Leith/Andrew Dunkley

Take, for instance, Judd's *Untitled* (fig 8.6): a large copper box, about waist height, open at the top. The relationship between the inside and outside of the box is immediately intriguing. The inside is a deeper, richer shade of pinky-orange than the soft golden

[23] Ibid., 15

shade of the outside. At first, the inside of the box looks as if it has been coated or lined in a different material. Viewers approach with a mind to confirm this, and discover that the bottom of the box is covered in red enamel. The perceived shading on the box's insides is actually due to this vibrant colour being reflected.

Other pieces, too, are structured around a revelation. Consider *To Susan Buckwalter* (fig. 8.7). This work consists of four galvanised iron cubes (30 inches square) cantilevered from the wall, with 7 inch gaps between them. Due to the dramatic perspectival recession created by the deep, high sides of the cubes, these gaps appear murky, like dark alleyways between buildings. The cubes appear to hang from a length of aluminium covered in blue lacquer. Because the work is set roughly at eye level, the front face of the blue part obscures the extent of its depth. At first, one assumes that it is as deep as the cubes and extends all the way back to the wall – but in that case would not the gaps get darker towards the top, not lighter as they appear to do? A puzzle arises; an unexplained light source materialises.

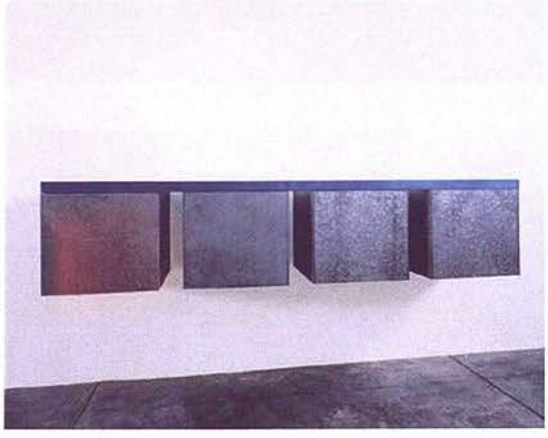
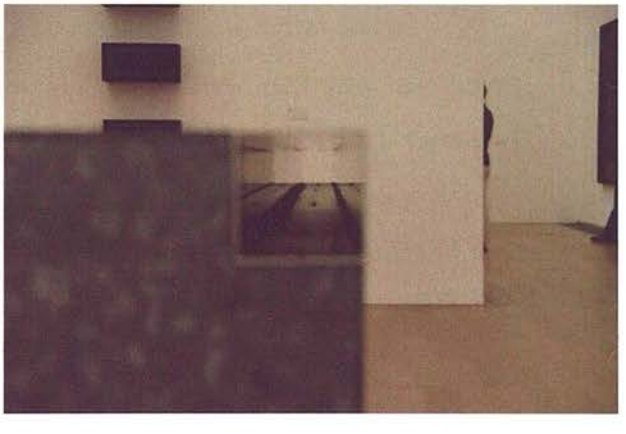


Fig 8.7 Donald Judd, *To Susan Buckwalter*, 1964, galvanised iron and blue lacquer on aluminium, 30" x 141" x 30", Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, Gift of Frank Stella; photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn

Motivated to find out more, one moves to the side. The blue length is revealed to be a square tube, open at the ends, that runs across the top front edge of cubes. This aspect of the wall works is rarely shown in documentation, but it can be seen in flickr photos of similar pieces resting on the floor (fig. 8.8). The viewer discovers that the cubes each have an incised square section that cradles the tube snugly. This reverses the initial impression that the four cubes are hanging from a bar. In fact, it seems, the cubes support

the bar between them. Just as there are openings between the cubes underneath the bar, there are similar openings behind it, which is what allows that strange shaft of light to penetrate the darkening intervals between cubes. Finding this pipe open-ended, the temptation to look down its length is strong (fig 8.9). Inside these pipes, the curious are rewarded with a startling secret effect. There is a repetition of the crystalline self reflection that we saw inside Judd's purple-lined box, which created a frame within a frame effect (fig. 8.10).

Fig 8.8 (left) Donald Judd gallery, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; photo: pablosanz (Flickr)
Fig. 8.9 (below left) Donald Judd gallery, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; photo: ---m--- (Flickr)
Fig. 8.10 (below right) Donald Judd gallery, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; photo: joor... (Flickr)



Judd's works are studies in structural suspense, then. There are no hidden mechanics in Judd's works - the bolts and fixings are usually there for everyone to see through transparent surfaces and openings. But units and box sides are arranged in such a way that one part of the structure blocks another part from view, giving the viewer the

compulsion to move, as if to see what is 'around the corner'. As we know, Krauss felt the discovery of a new element or unexpected relationship changed one's perception of the structure of the work retrospectively, and exposed one's first impressions as, not erroneous exactly, but as riven with blind spots. The realisation that the work has 'withheld' something from the viewer endows it with a kind of agency. This makes for an uncanny, confrontational, quality, which critics such as Fried noticed from the outset. What I want to consider is whether seeing this approach/discovery trajectory in terms of film will provide a new philosophical perspective on such hidden anthropomorphism. First, I unpack the idea of framing, and second, the significance of movement.

Inside/outside the frame

Deleuze saw the action of framing in cinema as '*the determination of a closed system which includes everything which is present in the image* – sets, characters and props.'[24] The elements within the frame were 'the data [*données*]' of an information system. Deleuze noted that frames *within* frames were frequently used by film directors 'Doors, windows, box office windows, skylights, car windows, mirrors, are all frames in frames [...] It is by this dovetailing of frames that the parts of a set or of the closed system are separated, but also converge and are re-united.'[25] This enhanced, in other words, the deterritorialising effect of the screen. Like Marin, who argued that the film frame effectively *pointed at* the thing it enclosed,[26] Deleuze suggested that 'the frame teaches us that the image is not just given to be seen. It is legible as well as visible.'[27] The viewer was invited to read the framed set for significance. Deleuze argued that whereas a thing circulated in relation to other things around it, the perception of that thing constituted 'the same image related to another special image which frames it [...]'[28] Perception constituted a double framing: of the perceived thing, and that thing *seen as image*.

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[24] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 12
[25] Ibid., 14
[26] See above, 272-3
[27] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta, (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 156
[28] Ibid., 63

Judd's works frequently corral, enclose, and mirror space, creating 'images' of the real and frames within frames. By re-presenting portions of space, Judd's works produce effects akin to Bazin's 'masking' and Marin's 'reflexive' framing. The analogy comes to life, however, when we consider *both* frames in Deleuze's idea of a 'set': the framing of space by Judd's sides and surfaces, *and* the viewer's perceptual framing of such frames, conducted on the move. In cinema, the transition from one frame or set to another is determined by the filmmaker. In the examples of Judd's work that I have described, such transitions are made by the viewer. Motivated by intriguing partial views and entertaining parallax shifts, they move on from one view – one perceptual 'frame' – to the next. Thus, one's movement in front of a Judd work clearly differs from the freeform back and forth movement required by more traditional art works. It seems more directed, even, than the perambulations prompted by de Cock's installations. The process of viewing a work by Judd emulates the suspense sequence in film narrative. We begin with an 'establishing' shot. The appearance of an intriguing anomaly moves us to explore further: we proceed with a 'dolly' shot that culminates in a surprising reveal. Then, judging by the evidence of flickr, some of us are drawn in further, and finish with a 'close-up'. Is it fruitful to compare the movement around Judd's works with a travelling movie camera?

There is a scene in Tarkovsky's *Mirror* when the protagonists run outside to see a barn on fire. The camera, meanwhile, stays where it is. We become aware of the autonomy of the camera for the first time: it begins to back slowly out of the room, pauses to watch a bottle fall to the floor, and then turns around, as if to follow the others. We have the startling impression that we are looking through the eyes of an unseen character – perhaps a person is dreaming or remembering the scene. We can hear the roar of the fire, but cannot see it. The mobile camera, a character in its own right now, progresses through the back door and along a terrace. Inside the frames created by the door, the roof and pillars, aspects of the scene are only gradually revealed: first we see rain, then a ladder propped up, then the back of a woman, and only after an extended period of travel do we finally gain an uninterrupted view of the barn aflame.

Just as each frame that the camera shows us here is pervaded by what is out of view, so is each sequential glimpse of a work by Judd. Anticipation and memory are bound up in every step. (I will look at the idea of the recollection-image in more detail shortly). But beyond such projections – which we perform instinctively – there lies something else. Deleuze argued that the 'out-of field' (which refers us 'to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present'[29]) has two, intermingled, aspects. At times, the out-of-field is simply 'that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around'; sometimes, though, the out-of-field testifies 'to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous time and space.'[30] In Judd's works, arguably, the material structure determines the straightforward 'elsewhere' that is found 'to one side or around'. The immaterial light effects they produce, meanwhile, gesture towards the 'more radical Elsewhere', that is to say, the disturbing openness of the 'whole'.

What interests me here is that in film, Deleuze implied, this disturbing presence can take on an anthropomorphic quality. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, he argued, set up as its norm a 'natural perception,' the conditions of which were 'existential co-ordinates which define[d] an "anchoring" of the perceiving subject in the world.'[31] Movement in cinema, however, displaced this natural order of perception. Deleuze claimed that,

> The cinema can, with impunity, bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them, it suppresses both the anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world. Hence it substitutes an implicit knowledge and second intentionality for the conditions of natural perception.[32]

The striking thought presents itself, that Judd's anthropomorphism might have less to do with objects looking back at us, and more with the sensation of an 'other' who watches beside or behind us.

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[29] Deleuze, Cinema 1, 16
[30] Ibid., 17
[31] Ibid., 57
[32] Ibid.

Though we may be propelled in a particular direction by the operation of suspense, our movements around Judd's works are not dictated by the creator as they are in film. I have argued, though, that Judd's moving reflections occasionally acquire a startling appearance of autonomy. In Cinema 2, Deleuze continued his exploration of movement in cinema, arguing that '*Automatic movement* gives rise to a *spiritual automaton* in us, which reacts in turn on movement.'[33]

> The spiritual automaton no longer designates – as it does in classical philosophy – the logical or abstract possibility of formally deducing thoughts from each other, but the circuit into which they enter with the movement-image, the shared power of what forces thinking and what thinks under the shock.[34]

For Deleuze, the movement-image provokes the shock that 'arouses the thinker' in each of us. Hiller's *Magic Lantern* and Hatoum's *Light Sentence* produce precisely this kind of shock – their automatic movements undoubtedly produce 'spiritual automatons' in us. Can the same be said for de Cock and Judd?

In the last chapter I argued that the language of cinema 'permeate[d]' our world. Chambers suggested that it 'ghost[ed] our presence': it was 'part of our understanding."[35] While Baudrillard and Virilio and others worry that taking on the weightlessness of cinema in everyday life might obliterate our self-conscious autonomy, de Cock has found in film a 'form that thinks', and uses it in order to make tangible the spectral obliteration threatened by spectacle. We can now see how his abrupt framings, his kaleidoscopic sections, vistas and reflections, prompt thought by producing shocks. In comparison to de Cock's works, Judd's are less 'spectacular'. They make us move, and they play with perspective, but on a more confined scale. I would argue, though, that the more directed, narrative suspense and singular deceptions in Judd's works are just as liable to provoke a (split) consciousness of 'what forces thinking and what thinks under the shock.'[36]

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[33] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 156
[34] Ibid.
[35] Chambers, 'Maps, Movies, Musics and Memory', 230-31. See above, 280-1
[36] See n. 33

Travelling shots

Earlier, I compared Judd's horizontal reflections to a 'reflecting pool.' I now consider the surprising vertical reflections that appear unexpectedly in the anodised aluminium blocks of *Untitled* (fig. 8.11). These, too, warrant comparison with the automatic movement of cinema. They also open up a space for thinking about time. These eight blocks increase in width from left to right in proportions that accord with the Fibonacci sequence (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc). The spaces between the blocks follow the same pattern but in reverse. The striking length of the piece demands that viewers not only move, but perambulate - at over 6m it is longer than most rooms (fig 8.12).

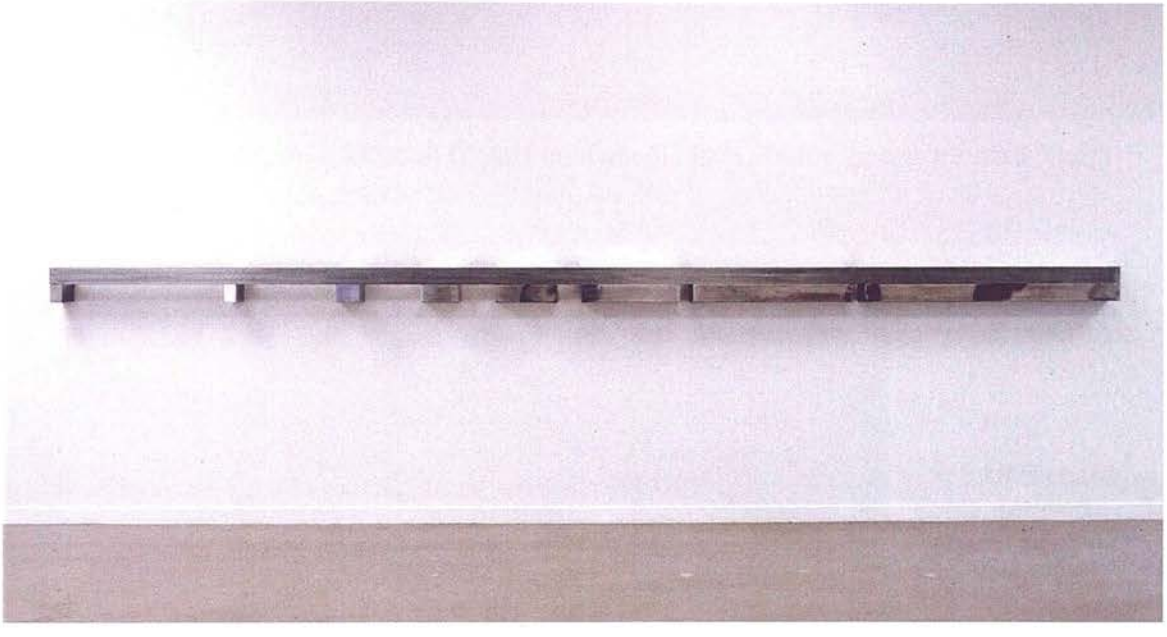

Fig 8.11 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1969, clear anodised aluminium and brushed aluminium, 21x 646.6 x 20.3 cm, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

The blocks and gaps alternate at increasing / decreasing intervals, giving the illusion of acceleration. Perhaps for this reason, the perambulation comes to feel like driving, approximating the sensation of cruising past buildings and alleys in a car. One's own reflection appears intermittently in the mirrored aluminium blocks, recalling the distant self-view that is afforded by shop windows en route around a city. Each time one's image disappears its re-emergence is anticipated with eagerness.

Fig 8.12 Donald Judd, installation at Cinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas; photo: rdbeerd (flickr)

Fig 8.13 Richard Estes, *Untitled,* 1973-4, screenprint on paper, 85.1 x 119.1cm, Tate Gallery

Discussing Judd's enthusiasm for commercial materials and colours of the automobile industry, David Batchelor referred readers to a Richard Estes painting which shows two shop windows, complete with reflections of parked cars (fig 8.13). He suggested that in

Photorealist pictures like this one 'the precisionist virtual space leaves little room in which to move around, there are no gaps or holes; and there are thus few spaces for the viewer. They are *static*. They ask you to stand still.'[37] Batchelor contrasted the *virtual* space in Estes' painting, which he characterised as abstracted and located out of time, with Judd's more *situated* and navigable sculpture. This is a misleading distinction on two counts: first, as we already know, in Judd's works, too, there are virtual spaces which appear out-of-time; and, second, one *is* compelled to continue past the window in Estes painting, at least in one's mind. There is stasis, but it is one of *arrest* rather than stillness. Photorealism refers us to the photograph, which freezes a moment that we cannot normally see in isolation. Comparable to the mid-air suspension in Viola's Reflecting Pool, such an uncanny suspension of time compels us to reconstruct the moments immediately preceding and following that mechanically-achieved arrest.

If the photographic image is generated by a single, centred camera 'eye,' the question arises as to where that 'eye' is located here? Between the two windows, in front of the less reflective slabs of marble and ceramic? If so, it occupies a blind spot. The viewer feels herself perpetually on the verge of re-emerging from this blind zone, and re-appearing as a warped reflection in the second window. The 'gap' that Batchelor does not notice, then, is a spatio-temporal one. This strikes me as the *equivalent*, rather than the antithesis, of the feeling of anticipation as one passes between two pieces of polished aluminium in Judd's progression. Where is my reflection when I am poised between blocks, in the blind spot? It does not exist anywhere except as a possibility.

Interestingly, Deleuze argued that the still life was a time-image, 'a little time in its pure state', because it conveyed the idea that time runs on, but the concept of time is static. 'The still life is time' he explained, 'for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change.'[38] We should not be surprised then, if the time-image is often static. Halted between two blocks of Judd's wall progression, the time-image lies in wait. As Deleuze remarked,

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[37] David Batchelor, 'Everything as Colour' in Serota, *Donald Judd*, 70
[38] Ibid.

> The time-image does not imply the absence of movement (even though it often includes its increased scarcity) but it implies the reversal of the subordination; it is no longer time which is subordinate to movement, but movement which subordinates itself to time.[39]

Crystal-time

It is in Judd's vertical stacks that this time-image is most clearly visible, though it remains difficult to spot. It is perhaps only once one has been primed by more spectacular works that one notices one of Judd's most subtle reflective effects. Judd instructed that the gaps between the units in a vertical stack should have exactly the same dimensions as those units. The reflection of a 'unit' of space is thus mapped onto the exact parameters of the units above and below it (fig 8.14 shows solid brass units - the illusion of transparency and space can just be seen inside the top units.)

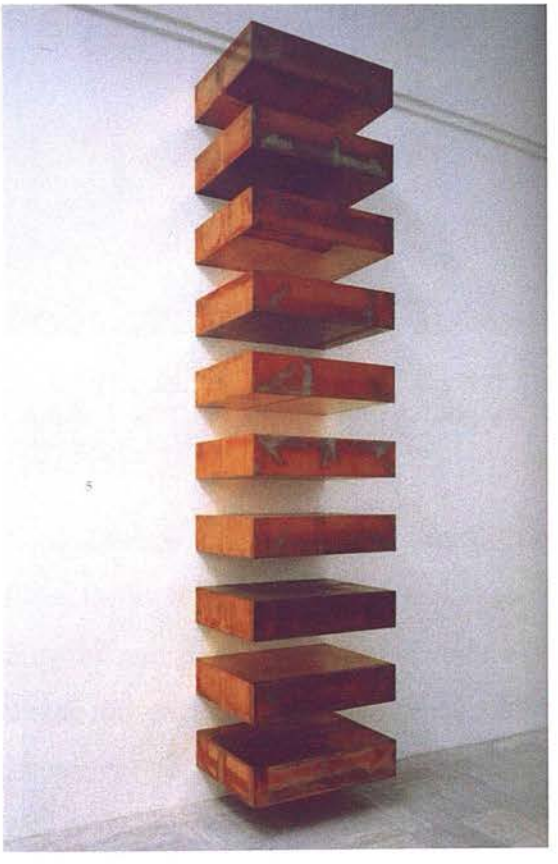

Fig 8.14 Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1969, copper, 10 units, each 23 x 101.6 x 78.7 cm, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection, 1991

[39] Ibid., 271

It was a revelation to discover that each unit appeared to contain a ghost. I experienced the same frisson of surprise that I'd felt listening to the voices of the dead in Hiller's *Magic Lantern*. These spectres had been there all along, in every single stack, waiting for me to see them. Was such a startling and clever illusion just an unintentional side effect, unnoticed by Judd himself? I have no way of knowing, but it was not possible to ignore it, in any case.

Fig 8.15 Donald Judd, *Untitled* by Donald Judd (and *Night* by Lisa Yuskavage) on display at Christie's, 2007; photo: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

Looking more closely, further shocks ensued. At first glance, the corners of the walls (seen through the gaps in the stack) seemed to continue inside the units, (Fig 8.15 shows how the rectilinear edges of the picture on the wall opposite seem to be reconstituted inside the stack). It was only when a human figure came into view, that I realised these lines were not continued but *inverted*, as of course they must be. But until the inversion was revealed, the image sitting inside each stack seemed more like a ghost than a reflection.

Even though the source of each reflective relay can be painstakingly worked out, one's mind tends to take a short cut, and the uncanny complexity of the effect remains undiminished. In fig. 8.15, we see that the reflection of the bottom edge of the upper stack can be found occupying the same space as the actual bottom edge of the lower stack. Mutual reflections are created by many of Judd's modular arrangements; here the work reflects and pictures *itself*, first and foremost. Moving one's perspective from one to the other requires a shift of mental focus; similar to a filmic focus pull, except the actual focus remains in the same place. When focussing on one edge, the other becomes virtual; that is, the phantom is actual while one attends to it, and the actual edge becomes virtual when it passes from attention. Deleuze had an elegant description for this:

> When the virtual image becomes actual, it is then visible and limpid, as in the mirror or the solidity of the finished crystal. But the actual image becomes virtual in its turn, referred elsewhere, invisible, opaque and shadowy, like a crystal barely dislodged from the earth.[40]

When actual and virtual states are superimposed in one image, there is 'a distinction between two sides, but they are indiscernible'.[41] In fact, Deleuze went on, this conflation of actual and virtual happens all the time.

> What is actual is always a present. But then, precisely, the present changes or passes. We can always say that it becomes past when it no longer is, when a new present replaces it. But this is meaningless. It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time.[42]

A circuit is established, comparable to that between an object and its mirror image, or in a film flashback;[43] a 'short-circuit' is produced between the character who tells a story 'in the past' and the person 'able to relate it.' We are beginning to see how Judd's stack

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[40] Ibid., 70
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 79
[43] 'There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual *and* virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned to the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture' Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema* 2, 68

might correspond to Viola's swimming pool or Fischer and el Sani's expressway. In a flashback, time is contracted, rather than dilated, and distinct images are brought together.

Deleuze called this the 'crystal-image'. The crystal-image in film is a circuit constituted by actual and virtual image in continual exchange. In this endless reconstitution, according to Deleuze, *time itself* is revealed: 'what we see in the crystal is time itself, a bit of time in the pure state, the very distinction between the two [indiscernible] images which keeps on reconstituting itself.'[44] As we know, in 1966 Smithson argued that the displacement of the classical models of time and space by contemporary artists allowed 'the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures, or both combined.' Indeed, he added, 'The concealed surfaces in Donald Judd's works are hideouts for time.'[45]

Deleuze regarded the time-image as an advance on the movement-image - it is a feature of post-war cinema almost exclusively. While automatic movement shocks us into thinking about a concept, the time-image is rather an 'unconscious concept' materialised. 'Earlier,' he writes, 'we went from the shock image to the formal and conscious concept, but now from the unconscious concept to the material-image, the figure-image which embodies it and produces shock in turn.'[46] This figure, Deleuze claimed, 'gives the image an affective charge which will intensify the sensory shock.'[47] The ghost in Judd's stacks is one such figure. Seen from this perspective, it 'returns' as a precursor to Tatham and O'Sullivan's 'figural' figures, which in their own way seem to emerge from the matrix, a realm associated with the primary process. For Deleuze, the appearance of the time-image reconfigures the conception of the 'whole' that was produced by the movement-image:

> The highest form of consciousness in the work of art has as correlate the deepest form of subconscious, following a 'double process' or two co-existing moments. We no longer go from the movement-image to the clear-thinking whole that it

[44] Ibid., 82
[45] Smithson, 'Entropy and the New Monuments', 11
[46] Deleuze, *Cinema* 2, 159
[47] Ibid.

> expresses; we go from a whole which is presupposed and obscure to the agitated, mixed up images which express it. The whole is no longer the logos which unifies the parts, but the drunkenness, the pathos which bathes them and spreads out in them.[48]

His description of the images produced by this 'drunkenness' can be applied to the works I have described in my case-studies, and is thus worth quoting:

> From this point of view images constitute a malleable mass, a descriptive material loaded with visual and sound features of expression, synchronized or not, zig-zags of forms, elements of action, gestures and profiles, syntactic sequences. This is a primitive language or thought, or rather an *internal monologue*, a drunken monologue, working through figures, metonymies, synechdoches, metaphors, inversions, attractions...[49]

The time-image represents the monologue, in other words, of ones who try to speak to spectres.

Concluding remarks

The filmic values that I have perceived in Judd's work cannot be said to constitute a strategy or reference on the artist's part, but are an 'addition' that I bring. His own critical practice arguably sanctions this approach.[50] My correlation of Judd's works with film, urban architecture, crystals and cars, should not be construed as an interpretation of the artist's conscious intentions, or an unconscious reflection of his context. I have marshalled such associations as a way of dealing with the objects 'as objects'; they have helped me to turn their forms around in my mind. Judd did not conceive of his work in filmic terms in the 1960s, but his pieces – which were made with reflective transparent surfaces, and which performed serial geometrical framings and created suspense with missing explanations – held a place open for a cinematic reading in the future.

Although my interpretation exceeds the scope of Judd's own writings, it has not been my intention to ignore their spirit. Judd's avowed project was to produce stimulating

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] See above, 115

specificities that would resist collapse into something (or somewhere) else. At the same time, his skill in allying dissimilar things, and preserving their polarity, materialised certain startling paradoxes. Judd conceived his 'specific objects' in order to stave off the perceived 'threat' of illusionism; he resisted the idea of sculpture as image, and attempted to thwart sculpture's spectacularisation. But in incorporating the specific objects' opposite and nemesis – the image – the works were able to deal with their own anxious condition. They could speak to the spectres of spectacle, rather than exorcising them outright (an action that would be destined to fail because, as Derrida tells us, an exorcism conjures what it abhors.)

It is clear that Judd does not attempt to tackle the formation of cultural positions, like Hiller and Hatoum, nor does he openly engage with the realm of social action like Tatham and O'Sullivan and de Cock, but this does not mean that Judd's works can be dismissed as modernist formalism. They were forged at a time when anxieties about the society of the spectacle were gaining ground, and they take up a Janus-faced position in this regard: re-asserting faith in direct experience, specificity and concrete relations while at the same time hinting at dematerialised registers of spectacular experience even amidst such materiality. Judd's address to perception and movement might serve to associate the work with the movement-image - a slightly arcane mode - but I have shown that Judd's structures also incorporated surprising and puzzling short-circuits of time and space, giving rise to a further association with the time-image. As Judd's suspenseful structures and contingent perspectives systematically eliminate the ground for generalization and remove any intimation of a 'clear-thinking whole,' (to use Deleuze's phrase)[51] the idea that the universe is constituted by shifting singularities is not only grasped conceptually, but *felt* as well.

I started this thesis with a brief history of shadows and their role in various programmes of defamiliarisation in modernism. I have concluded with a discussion of Judd's reflections. In *ostranenie* artists sought to bring marginal optical effects to the centre of our attention. Here, in contrast, such effects *remain* marginal – it is up to us, the

[51] See above, 307

audience, to re-orientate our gaze and access small shocks of uncanny recognition. Both in terms of phenomenology and discourse, Judd's reflections are incidental. However, I have established the extraordinary potential of turning one's attention to the incidental, and looking for spectres in the most well-known (brightly illuminated?) works of the recent past. I have also shown that, while it is undoubtedly important to return to the writings of an artist like Judd, it also pays to put them to one side on occasion.

I have been amazed and gratified by the sheer thematic potency and conceptual aptness of the motif of the spectre: as a metaphor for blind spots, for optical effects, for *revenants*, and as a function of the operations of attention and history. I feel certain that I have established an interesting new model for approaching the history of this art – and a compelling argument for cultivating a double vision as historian and critic. Judd's objects are veritable 'hideouts' for them, perhaps partly as a result of the constraining parameters which he imposed upon himself. Hiller, Hatoum, Tatham and O'Sullivan and de Cock *intend* to speak to spectres. Their bold and open engagement with the spectres of minimalism serves to bring to light the spectres that Judd could not see. For today's viewer, this ambivalence adds to the work's complexity. Certainly, after ten years of looking intently at Judd's works, they can still surprise me.

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